

A METHODOLOGY FOR PREACHING TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS  
WITH PHARISAICAL TENDENCIES

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To my father and mother who sacrificed so that I might have.

To Jenny

My companion in life

and to

Ava and Lauren

Journeyers with us on the way.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis-project addresses the thought process that results in pharisaic behaviors and provides a methodology for effectively communicating to contemporary Christians with pharisaic tendencies to achieve transformational results. After tracing the formation of pharisaic thought which produces a unique self-identity, it presents a proposed manual for Christian communicators to teach students how to effectively speak to the foundational issues that inform pharisaic doctrine and action.

## CHAPTER 1

### IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

Each year in the homiletic community, several articles and books<sup>1</sup> are published to help Christian communicators speak more effectively to specific subgroups of his/her audience. Understandably, the expressed focus of many of these resources is to equip communicators to better connect and influence secular-minded unbelievers. Yet, for preachers and teachers who struggle to build healthy churches capable of reaching non-Christians, their desire to evangelize and disciple is often rivaled by their frustration with pharisaical church members who seem to undermine the spiritual health of the congregation. Often the more frequent question whispered by pastors is not, “How do I win non-Christians with the gospel of Jesus Christ?” but “How do I handle my troublesome, judgmental, self-righteous parishioners who hinder the health of this church?” As church leaders seek to win the irreligious with the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, they often sense the religious in their midst are in need of conversion too.

The problem is that these religious, faithful attendees believe they have already been converted to the gospel. They are often good, moral people who form the working hands of the congregations. They do not deny that salvation comes by grace apart from their own merits. However, in their desire to please God they have often created a grace which is no grace and consequently a gospel that is no gospel. Instead of living by faith,

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<sup>1</sup> A quick perusing of a local library uncovered the following: *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* by Zack Eswine; *Preaching to a Shifting Culture* by Scott M. Gibson; *Preaching to Skeptics and Seekers* by Frank G. Honeycutt; *A Relevant Word: Communicating the Gospel to Seekers* by Robert G. Duffett and Gilbert Bilezikian; *How to Reach Secular People* by George G. Hunter; and *The Children's Sermon: Moments With God* by Janet S. Helme, to name a few.

these often well-intentioned people invent and conform to lists of rules intended to carve out Christian thought and behavior. Adherence to these subjective lists frequently becomes the requirement for acceptance in the faith community. In creating these lists, which are often collections of communal traditions or reactionary prohibitions against the current trends in secular culture, these parishioners place parameters on behavior in ways that exceed biblical authority. This is inevitably followed by judgmental condemnations and attitudes of superiority directed toward other professing Christians who express opposition or transgress their lists. In other words, a type of religion emerges that more closely resembles the religion of Second Temple Pharisees rather than New Testament Christians.

It is among these contemporary Pharisees that I was reared. From childhood I have been enmeshed in pharisaical thought and today, I consider myself a recovering Pharisee. My father spent his life doing pastoral work in independent congregations within conservative Fundamentalism. My mother did not wear a wedding ring because the church opposed all forms of jewelry. My brother did not play school sports because practice occasionally fell on Wednesday evenings, conflicting with Bible study. Pants on females were strictly prohibited so my sisters wore dresses to public schools, including during gym class. In my teen years my family moved away from our pharisaical roots and I was greatly mentored by faithful professors at the Anderson School of Theology. However, because I now pastor a congregation with a tradition of pharisaism, I again find myself enmeshed in pharisaical issues.

## *The Goal and Focus of the Project*

The purpose of this thesis-project is to enable Christian communicators to speak to pharisaical Christians and achieve transformational results. To accomplish this, the communicator will need to have a clearly defined understanding of pharisaism. After all, the term *Pharisee* is frequently used loosely.<sup>2</sup> We are often tempted to label as a *Pharisee* anyone who lives or thinks more conservatively than ourselves. A few years ago when William Dannemeyer, the long-time Republican representative from Orange County, California voted "nay" on the Americans with Disabilities Act, an angry constituent wrote the Los Angeles Times with this characterization:

He [Dannemeyer] is truly the modern-day Pharisee boldly proclaiming his self-righteousness with pride. . . . Maybe neither of us is divine, but I would rather occupy the role of the Samaritan who was despised by the religious leaders of the day for being different, than the self-righteous Pharisee at the front of the temple.<sup>3</sup>

While the accusation is crafty rhetoric, the important question is whether it is true. Is a contemporary Pharisee a person who votes against a bill that expands benefits to a portion of our society? Surely the term cannot be applied so loosely.

Yet, the communicator also needs a deeper understanding about the essence of pharisaism or the fundamental beliefs that compel the Pharisee to act as he does. This will enable the communicator to speak to those deeper realms within the pharisaic psyche. This means that the communicator must be willing to move beyond strategies that are often employed when addressing pharisaical Christians: making light of their convictions, demonizing them, or insulting their intelligence by speaking of grace in elemental terms.

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<sup>2</sup> W.D. Davies shares an amusing piece of history regarding the term. He writes, "The noun 'Pharisee' has such a bite to it that it was officially banned in 1902 from use as a term of opprobrium in the British House of Commons, along with 'hypocrite,' 'jackass,' and 'rat.'" W. D. Davies, *Introduction to Pharisaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), v.

<sup>3</sup> Editorial, *LA Times*, July 15, 1990.

These attempts to produce meaningful change in the heart of the Pharisee will prove feeble at best.

After all, the spirit of pharisaism is resilient. Pharisaism flourished in the first century and has survived since then with minor alterations. The reason that the pharisaic message still flourishes is because it appears rational, needful, and biblical. Their arguments are often refined, sharpened by study, and not as easily deflected as one might imagine. Those who preach to Christians with pharisaical tendencies without regard to their deeply refined doctrinal positions do so at their own risk. As Tom Hovestol warns,

Every pastor will encounter Pharisaism. A pastor armed with theology, Greek and Hebrew exegesis, expositional skills, and pastoral theology classes yet unaware of the pervasiveness of Pharisaism courts disaster. Conversely, understanding Pharisees will equip a pastor to encounter the subtle twists and, at times, unsuspected cruelty of people within the church. It will even help the minister to face the forces that lurk in his own soul—the scourge of self-righteousness and its cousin, contempt for others. A pastor naive to the presence, power, and practices of the Pharisees is prone to get ‘blown away’ by what he finds in the church—and sometimes his own soul.<sup>4</sup>

To accomplish this intent, chapter two will look at scripture and attempt to uncover the environmental factors that birthed pharisaic Judaism and formed their unique self-identity, the distinguishing characteristics that marked their DNA, and the dual message that Jesus forcefully espoused in his conversations with Pharisees.

Chapter three will attempt to uncover the essential nature of pharisaism through the aid of contemporary writers. The goal will be to bridge the gap between first century and 21<sup>st</sup> century pharisaism. Also, an attempt will be made to demonstrate the progression of pharisaism from the pharisaic self-identity to pharisaic behaviors.

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<sup>4</sup>Tom Hovestol, *Extreme Righteousness: Seeing Ourselves in the Pharisees* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 41.

Chapter four will provide a syllabus that can be used in a seminar setting. The goal of the seminar will be to enable participants to effectively communicate to contemporary Christians with pharisaic tendencies. Tim Keller, speaking of ministering to the culturally secular writes, “you have to show on the culture’s terms (that is, by its own definitions of justice, rationality, meaning,) that its objections to Christianity don’t hold up.”<sup>5</sup> This wise approach is not only helpful when speaking to secular-minded non-Christians but should be applied when speaking to pharisaical Christians. If deep, personal change is the desired objective, it may not be enough to communicate to contemporary Pharisees about their need. The communicator must also speak to them about themselves, in terms they have used to construct their doctrinal fortress. The seminar is broken into four sessions covering the following topics:

1. Defining Pharisaic Behavior in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
2. How Pharisaic Behaviors Result from the Pharisaic Self-Identity
3. How Jesus Spoke to Pharisees
4. Opportunities and Pitfalls when Speaking to Pharisees

The end result of the seminar is that participants will be able to recognize pharisaic behaviors, understand the pharisaic self-identity that informs pharisaic behaviors, and learn to speak directly to the pharisaic self-identity. This will enable the participants to minister to persons with pharisaic tendencies with new insight, avoiding pitfalls that produce unnecessary hostility and conflict. The long-term result of the seminar will be spiritual transformation among individuals with pharisaical backgrounds.

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Keller, “Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs: Leading the Secular to Christ,” [http://www.unc.ruf.org/site\\_content/attachments/0000/1198/Apologetics\\_and\\_Outreach.pdf](http://www.unc.ruf.org/site_content/attachments/0000/1198/Apologetics_and_Outreach.pdf) (accessed on February 23, 2012).



## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this thesis-project is to enable preachers to communicate to contemporary pharisaic Christians to achieve transformational results. Understanding Second Temple Pharisaism as it existed during Jesus' earthly ministry seems to be an appropriate place to start. Therefore, chapter two will look at scripture and attempt to uncover the environmental factors that birthed Pharisaic Judaism and formed their unique self-identity, the distinguishing characteristics that marked their DNA, and the dual message that Jesus forcefully espoused in his conversations with Pharisees.

#### *Pharisaic Judaism: Its Beginning and Self-Identity*

It is impossible to establish a date of origin for the Pharisees. R.T. Herford, an earlier scholar places their roots during the days of Ezra when the scribe found the Jews demoralized, disorganized, and paralyzed by their crushing defeat at the hands of Babylonian hordes three generations earlier.<sup>1</sup> The temple was gone and with it, national pride. The people of God drifted towards permanent apostasy, illiterate about their heritage, laws, and divine calling. Rather than achieving their divine purpose, they were threatened with annihilation as intermarriage among local Gentile nations reached epidemic proportions. To confront the decay, Ezra reestablished the Pentateuch as the governing law of Israel and championed reforms to rid the nation of Gentile influence. Herford writes,

If Moses were the real founder of the Jewish religion, giving to it the power to rise above and draw away from religions of 'the peoples round about,' Ezra stood forth at a most critical period to save the Jewish religion, and with it the national

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<sup>1</sup>R. Travers Herford, *The Pharisees* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 18.

life, from relapsing into decay through contact with Gentile ideas and practices. . . . The starting point of any history of Pharisaism must of necessity be the work of Ezra.<sup>2</sup>

W. D. Davies suggests that pharisaism took root during the ministry of Ezra noting that although “the express term ‘Pharisee’ does not occur in Ezra . . . the idea of Pharisaism is insipient in the book.”<sup>3</sup> Paul Hanson agrees, describing the Pharisees as “a powerful group standing in continuity with the tradition extending from Ezra to Sirach and preserving its devotion to the stringent demands of the Torah.”<sup>4</sup> The Jewish scholar Shaye J. D. Cohen sees the three major Jewish sects—Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes—taking root during the period following Babylonian defeat as well. Cohen believes “the three best-attested proto-sects” are the constituency of Ezra’s “congregation of the exile” and the group taking Nehemiah’s oath (Neh 10).<sup>5</sup> The reasoning behind his conclusion is that the statutes of Nehemiah’s covenant essentially outline their major theological positions—“the elimination of intermarriage and the expulsion of foreigners from the temple (Neh 13:1-9, 23-30); support of the temple and its clergy through tithes and offerings (Neh 13:10-14, 30-31); and the avoidance of commerce on the Sabbath (Neh 13:14-22).”<sup>6</sup>

Other scholars do not quickly assume that Pharisaic Judaism arose during the time of Ezra’s ministry, yet none deny that the sect of the Pharisees was an organized power player by the second century BC. Anthony J. Saldarini identifies the Pharisees as a social

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<sup>2</sup> Herford, *Pharisees*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> W. D. Davies, *Introduction to Pharisaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 2001), 348.

<sup>5</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 138.

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 138.

movement that was part of Palestinian Jewish society “from 200 B. C. E. to 100 C. E.”<sup>7</sup> Josephus records their political activity during the time of John Hyrcanus’ rule (134-104) and adds that during his reign, the Pharisees were the leading sect in Judaism.<sup>8</sup> “Pharisaic Jewry appears at the end of the second Temple in full development,”<sup>9</sup> writes Yehezkel Kaufmann. At critical times the Pharisees opposed John Hyrcanus, demonstrating that they were both organized and of some size numerically.<sup>10</sup>

While scholars vary in dating the Pharisee’s birthing into Jewish society, few deny the reason for their existence. The timing of the arrival of Pharisaic Judaism in Jewish history cannot be understated. It was a time in Jewish history when the glories of the United Kingdom of David and Solomon had long since faded, yet still remained in the imaginations of the people. The nation had turned from God and with the turning, had forfeited their bright destiny. In response to Israel’s apostate and downtrodden condition, the Pharisees took upon themselves the mantle of Ezra and began to work diligently for national revival.<sup>11</sup> To produce the revival of Israel, the Pharisees believed it was vitally important to reestablish the Law of Moses as the governing force in public and private

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducee in Palestinian Society* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc, 1988), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Josephus, *Ant. XIII, X, 5*, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1943.

<sup>9</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel, Volume 4* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1977), 563.

<sup>10</sup> “We do not know for sure how many Pharisees there were in the time of Jesus. The figure of six thousand, often quoted in this context from Josephus *Antiquities* 17.42, refers specifically to the Pharisees that refused to take the oath of allegiance to Caesar, some time in the reign of Herod the Great. In the forty years or so between that incident and the time of Jesus several important political events had taken place, which might well have induced many more to join the movement. We may assume that there were in any case plenty of Pharisees who were not involved with the particular incident in question, and more again who were generally sympathetic to the movement. To risk a modern analogy: the number of ecological activists engaged in one specific anti-nuclear protest in 1956 is not a good indicator of the number engaged in, or sympathetic to, such protests in 1996, following Chernobyl or similar events.” N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 377-378.

<sup>11</sup> “The Pharisees are foremost interested in the restoration of Israel. Their concern for keeping of the law, for the sanctity of the temple, for the purity of Israel and for the full Israelite claim on the land of Israel were fired by prophetic promise and charged with political implications.” *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 640.

life. They believed that keeping the Law of Moses, both written and oral<sup>12</sup> would restore the nation again to prominence.<sup>13</sup> In allowing the written and oral law to govern their public and private life, the Jewish people would remain a separate, distinct nation, free from Gentile influences.<sup>14</sup>

James D. G. Dunn describes the widely held view among the first century Jews concerning the law:

[There] was the sense that the law was a kind of defensive barricade which surrounded Israel and protected it from the defilement of other nations. God had separated Israel from the other nations, and the law preserved that separateness. This was why, for example, circumcision was so important to the Jews. . . . This is why the distinction between clean and unclean foods was so important; it reinforced the difference between Israel and the nations (see e. g. Leviticus 20:24-26). Again, this was why Gentiles were forbidden to enter the Temple sanctuary in Jerusalem; Mount Zion was the focal point of God's dwelling on earth, and so the most holy of all places. In short a fundamental conviction for Jews of Paul's time was that God had chosen Israel to be his own, and had given Israel the law to mark Israel off from other nations.<sup>15</sup>

While this belief was generally true of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, it was particularly true of first century Pharisaic Judaism. The complete effect of rigorous adherence to the written and oral law would be the fulfillment of Yahweh's divine intent for Israel- that it

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<sup>12</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 62-63. Dunn explains that a distinctive understanding that Pharisees held was that in addition to the written Law of Moses, there was also given by Moses an oral law illuminating the written law. This oral law was divided into two parts- the Halakah and the Haggadah. The Halakah recorded the rulings of earlier teachers on cases involving the Mosaic Law. These rulings were passed down and are what Mark and Matthew called "the tradition of the elders." In the second century AD, these rulings were written down in the Mishnah. The Mishnah later developed into the Talmud. The Haggadah was also an interpretation of scripture designed for edification rather than regulating conduct. It was less restricting than the Halakah because its aim was to provide moral lessons that were conducive to piety and devotion. Some of the Haggadah is preserved in the Talmud, but most was preserved separately in the various Midrashim.

<sup>13</sup>Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 48. Neusner writes, "to Josephus . . . Israel's welfare depends upon obedience to the laws of the Torah as expounded by the Pharisees and upon peaceful relationships with Rome." The Pharisees would have surely agreed with Josephus on the former assertion.

<sup>14</sup>"Practically all scholars now agree that the name 'Pharisee' derives from the Hebrew and Aramaic *parush* or *perushi* (in the plural *perushim*), which means 'one who is separated.'" Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 159.

<sup>15</sup>James D. G. Dunn and Alan M. Suggate, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 20-22.

would be a distinct, peculiar nation of priests.<sup>16</sup> Jacob Neusner, the influential Jewish historian says,

The Pharisees before the destruction were those Jews who believed that one must keep the purity laws outside of the Temple. Other Jews, following the plain sense of Leviticus, supposed that purity laws were to be kept only in the Temple, where priests had to enter a state of ritual purity in order to carry out the requirements of the cult, such as animal sacrifice. . . . The Pharisees thus arrogated to themselves—and to all Jews equally—the status of Temple priests and did the things which priests must do on account of their status. The table of every Jew in his home was seen to be like the table of the Lord in the Jerusalem Temple. The commandment “You shall be a kingdom of priests and holy people,” was taken literally.<sup>17</sup>

Geoffrey W. Bromiley reinforces Neusner’s assessment, writing, “the Pharisees considered themselves ‘holy ones’ and claimed to be the ‘remnant.’ They attempted to realize the OT promise of the ‘holy remnant’ (Isa 6:13; 4:2) by faithful adherence to the *tora* (cf. Tg. Isa 4:3; 10:22) and by meticulous separation from the unclean ‘people of the land’ (‘*am-ha’ares*).”<sup>18</sup> In many ways, this remnant self-understanding became the essence of Second Temple Pharisaism. Mark A. Elliot writes, “a notoriously thorny question, concerns the self-understanding of the Pharisees and their relationship to the rest of Israel. According to some scholars, the Pharisees regarded themselves as the ‘true Israel,’ that is, those who exclusively obey the Law and deserve to inherit the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>19</sup> For the Pharisees, “the only true Israel are those who punctiliously observe the Torah, and since the Pharisees alone do this, they are the *only true Israel*.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Exodus 19:6.

<sup>17</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 4: Q-Z* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 134.

<sup>19</sup> Mark A. Elliot, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 43.

<sup>20</sup> Elliot, *Survivors*, 44.

Hansen connects the pharisaic remnant mentality to the time of Antiochus

Epiphanes and his attempts to Hellenize Judea. He writes,

Needless to say, the Hellenistic “reforms” was perceived by many as a frontal attack on the substance of their religion, and an attempt to undo the effects of the thousand-year history through which they had been formed into a people separate from the other peoples of the world. Their special relationship with the God of Abraham and Moses was threatened as they were invited to take their place among the pagan nations of the world. . . . The severity of the present crisis had the effect of galvanizing such elements into a new sense of solidarity and purpose. They viewed themselves as the remnant called by God to preserve the sacred traditions within a people characterized by growing laxity and apostasy. The same chaotic conditions engendering this remnant mentality also proved to be an inducement towards viewing the world in increasingly apocalyptic terms. Within this context there emerged within the Jewish community a broadly based movement of those designated simply as *hasidim*: that is, “faithful ones.” Although not a religious party in a strict sense, the *hasidim* were to play an important role in the impending crisis. Beyond this, their concepts and beliefs were to have a lasting impact on the two parties that emerged out of their ranks, the Pharisees and the Essenes.<sup>21</sup>

In the Gospels, the degree of separation that should be maintained between Jews and Gentiles became a significant source of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees (Matt 15:1-3, 10-12; Luke 6:1-4; John 5:8-11).

To restate, pharisaism was birthed into Jewish society in reaction to the apostate, downtrodden condition present in the nation of Israel. Motivated by high ideals, the intent of the Pharisee was to restore Israel to glory by restoring the written and oral Law of Moses as the governing force in all aspects of life. In doing this, Israel would become a distinct nation, set apart from other peoples, fulfilling her divine destiny by becoming a nation of priests. The Pharisees understood themselves to be the remnant of faithful ones who were working for the salvation of Israel.

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<sup>21</sup> Hanson, *A People Called*, 342.

## ***Behavioral Characteristics of Second Temple Pharisees***

Despite lofty ideals for the people of God, the Christian Gospels chronicle several heated conflicts between the Pharisees and Jesus. The Gospel writers record that the Pharisees were Jesus' harshest critics and the recipients of Jesus' harshest criticisms. Jesus reserved for them his most pointed words and often, in his critiques, revealed a side of the Pharisees not seen by the multitudes (or even themselves for that matter). With verbal darts thrown with precision, Jesus chronicled the hidden motives that drove these devout practitioners of religion. Moreover, he laid the framework for identifying their contemporary spiritual heirs.

While the Gospels contain numerous encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees, Matthew 23 seems to chronicle confrontations Jesus had with these religious leaders of Israel.<sup>22</sup> These confrontations recorded by Matthew encapsulate the points of contention found throughout the Gospels. Therefore, this section will attempt to focus on this single passage.<sup>23</sup>

### **Pharisees make rules without divine authority.**

<sup>1</sup>*Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,*

<sup>2</sup>*saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;*

<sup>3</sup>*therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.*

<sup>4</sup>*"They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger."*

*--Matthew 23:1-4<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew 23 is almost unanimously seen as a montage of Jesus' conversations with the Pharisees. For a discussion see, D. A. Carson. *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Matthew*. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984,) 470; W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 283.

<sup>23</sup> All scripture quotations come from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

<sup>24</sup> Parallel passage- Luke 11:46.

Jesus' attacks are against the scribes and Pharisees, not any single scribe or Pharisee.<sup>25</sup> Jesus is making a full-frontal offensive against the dangers of pharisaism as a way of thinking.<sup>26</sup> In verse 2, the scribes and the Pharisees have seized the authority of Moses, exceeding divine authority. They have done this by creating and expanding the written Torah of Israel through oral tradition. Their intent was probably to contemporize the law and make the statutes clear to comprehend. Herman L. Strack explains,

The written, i. e. the pentateuchal, law had been completed at the very least since the times of Ezra . . . . Nothing could be added and nothing could be taken away or in any wise altered. Yet the constantly changing conditions of life required new regulations, and some sort of an organization must have been in operation . . . to make the Law effective in the life of the community, to preserve it, and to widen its scope.<sup>27</sup>

The intent was probably honorable but Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees that they sit in a place they have no right to sit.

This phrase "have seated themselves in the chair of Moses" is an interesting translation. Other translations such as the NIV and NKJV read-- "sit in Moses seat." However, D. A. Carson points out that this phrase is in the aorist tense, which is not usually translated as present. He writes,

The same aorist verb is used in Mark 16:19; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; Revelation 3:21—all of which refer to Jesus still sitting. But this misses the point. The emphasis in each of these instances is not that Jesus is still sitting, though this is

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<sup>25</sup>Carson, *Matthew*, 471. Concerning the scribes (literally "teachers of the law") and Pharisees, Carson writes "the 'teachers of the law,' most of them Pharisees in Matthew's time, were primarily responsible for teaching. 'Pharisee' defines a loose theological position, not a profession like 'teacher.' The two terms are distinct, even if there is much overlap on the personal level. An analogy might be the Puritan John Owen's denouncing the 'prelates and Roman Catholics' and then continuing his discourse with epithets like 'you prelates, you Catholics,' 'you prelates, Catholics.' 'Prelates' defines roles but does not mean that the only prelates are Catholics (some were Anglicans); the other—'Catholics'—defines theological position but does not require all Catholics to be prelates. This is how Jesus was attacking a theological position and those who promulgated it."

<sup>26</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), 490.

<sup>27</sup>Herman L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Atheneum, NY: A Temple Book, 1976), 9.



doubtless presupposed, but on the fact that as a result of his triumph he *sat down*.”<sup>28</sup>

It is Carson’s conclusion that verse 2 should have its “natural force: the teachers of the law and the Pharisees *sat down* in Moses’ seat (cf. NASB’s ‘having seated themselves,’ which may be overstated but has the right idea). The religious leaders have ‘presumed’ to sit in Moses’ seat.”<sup>29</sup> Doubtless, the masses could not differentiate between Moses’ written laws and the Pharisee’s oral rules, as they were held in equal stature by the scribes and Pharisees. David C. Sims suggests the Pharisees may have intentionally blurred the line between their legal creations and the Law of Moses.<sup>30</sup>

Given that the Pharisees have exceeded their authority, Carson believes that Jesus’ apparent confirmation of their authority in verse three is “biting irony.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus is speaking in tongue and cheek fashion, as an employee may speak of another employee who has a bossy disposition but has no authority to give orders by their superiors. Ulrich Luz seconds Carson’s conclusion writing, “it is in my judgment impossible to assume that Matthew actually called the church to obey all the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. He is above all interested in the second part of the logion: Jesus’ hearers are *not* to do the deeds of the scribes and the Pharisees, for they themselves do not do what they say.”<sup>32</sup>

What is not ironic is Jesus’ clear denunciation of their contradictory behavior. The Pharisees like to write laws but do not keep the burdensome laws that they put on others. So Jesus says, “do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do

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<sup>28</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 473.

<sup>29</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 473.

<sup>30</sup> David C. Sims, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 114.

<sup>31</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 473.

<sup>32</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 101.

them” (v. 3). Specific examples of “saying” but not “doing” are not given here although Mark 7:10-13, where the Pharisees do not honor their parents because of *corban* could be cited as one example. Throughout Matthew 23, Jesus’ doubts about the Pharisee’s genuine concern for the law unfold, as they seem to embrace the letter but oppose the spirit behind the law. “The minutiae were observed, but God’s love, of which the Law was an expression was easily forgotten.”<sup>33</sup>

To make matters worse, the created laws of the Pharisees put heavy burdens on their followers. For instance, in their interpretation of what it means to keep the Sabbath, 39 different kinds of work were forbidden including making two loops, sewing two stitches, or writing two letters.<sup>34</sup> These laws were burdensome for the average person to remember let alone perform. Or consider what an unnecessary nuisance it was for a common laborer to wash his hands in a priestly manner before he ate his lunch in the field. The oral law dictated that the worker should wash his hands before eating and *between* (emphasis added) courses.<sup>35</sup> William Barclay describes the procedure: “first the water must be poured over the hands beginning at the tips of the fingers and running right up to the wrist. Then the palm of each hand must be cleansed by rubbing the fist of the other into it. Finally, the water must again be poured over the hands, this time beginning at the wrist and running down to the fingertips.”<sup>36</sup>

There were few exceptions to these binding interpretations of the scribes and Pharisees. There was no relief for that person who found that keeping these laws had a negative effect on his health. Again, Barclay mentions a rabbi who was imprisoned by the

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<sup>33</sup> Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 278.

<sup>34</sup> Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 158.

<sup>36</sup> Barclay, *Luke*, 158.

Romans and given a ration of water with his meals. Rather than drinking the water, he used it to wash his hands and nearly perished of thirst.<sup>37</sup>

In Matthew's montage, Jesus' first criticism of the Pharisees is that they have exceeded their authority, making laws they have no right to make. They are operating outside of divine blessing and are making it hard for others to serve God by placing heavy legalistic burdens on them in the name of Moses. These burdens press people down, which made serving God appear to be burdensome when in reality it is light (Matt 11:30).

### **Pharisees glory in their piety.**

*<sup>5</sup>"But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.*

*<sup>6</sup>"They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,*

*<sup>7</sup>and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.*

*<sup>8</sup>"But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.*

*<sup>9</sup>"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.*

*<sup>10</sup>"Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.*

*<sup>11</sup>"But the greatest among you shall be your servant.*

*<sup>12</sup>"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.*

*--Matthew 23:5-12<sup>38</sup>*

The motives of the Pharisees come under heavy fire in verse 5. "They do all their deeds to be noticed by men," Jesus says. As opposed to doing less than the law requires (v. 3), they are accused of doing more than is necessary though only for their own glory.<sup>39</sup> One way they did this was through adornment. Phylacteries were "small leather boxes containing portions of the Torah (Exod 13:1-16; Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-32) strapped to

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<sup>37</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 167.

<sup>38</sup> Parallel passages- Mark 12:38-39; Luke 11:43, 20:45-46.

<sup>39</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 431.

the forehead and arm during the recitation of prayers, in literal obedience to Deut 6:8.”<sup>40</sup> Fringes refer to “tassels attached to the prayer shawl (Num 15:38-39; Deut 22:12).”<sup>41</sup> In themselves, “the externals [were] not the problem, but they [became] the problem when they no longer serve[d] to shape the prayer life.”<sup>42</sup> Instead of promoting prayer, the Pharisees used these items to draw attention to their persons.

A second way the Pharisees sought glory was by desiring the best seats at parties and the chief seats in synagogues. At the party, the place of honor was nearest to the host.<sup>43</sup> At the synagogue the chief seats were likely seats facing the congregation occupied by the teachers and leaders.<sup>44</sup> These seats were places of honor for those held in esteem. A third mark of glory seeking was the way in which Pharisees loved respectful greetings, “for it was a sign of respect to a superior if he was greeted first by another man.”<sup>45</sup>

Jesus then points out the Pharisee’s love of titles. The term “rabbi”<sup>46</sup> literally meant “my master” or “my teacher” and was a sign of respect, sometimes being used of Jesus himself (Matt 26:25, 49; John 1:38; 3:26).<sup>47</sup> Later during the Talmudic period, the position of rabbi took on a far deeper meaning. A disciple owed his rabbi unquestioned

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<sup>40</sup> M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 89.

<sup>41</sup> Boring and Craddock, *People’s Commentary*, 89.

<sup>42</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 197.

<sup>43</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), 317.

<sup>44</sup> Boring and Craddock, *People’s Commentary*, 89.

<sup>45</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 499.

<sup>46</sup> Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 154. “Virtually all scholars see the rabbis as descendent of the Pharisees.” What’s more, “the house of Gamaliel known from Josephus and the New Testament to be Pharisaic, assumed the leadership of the rabbis around 100 C. E. Therefore the pre-70 Pharisees must have had some intimate connection with the post-70 rabbis.”

<sup>47</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 474.

obedience, could never walk beside him, and would never greet his rabbi first.<sup>48</sup> This process was not in full flower during Jesus' ministry but it is possible that the process had begun, accounting for Jesus' statements designed to expose its presence.<sup>49</sup>

Jesus' forbidding of the use of titles such as "teacher" and "father" seems to be two-fold. First, the titles created inequality among disciples, for "you are all brothers" (v.8). Stanley Hauerwas suggests that Jesus "is denying all uses of the appellation 'father' when that title is put in service by those who use the term to justify their power over others."<sup>50</sup> Then second, the use of titles gives status to persons that rightfully belongs to Christ (v. 9). As Ulrich Luz eloquently writes,

With the term "brothers" Matthew takes as his model the people of God rather than a model of a school in which there obviously are beginners and advanced students, pupils, and teachers . . . What appears to be an unimportant prohibition that the teachers in the church not "adorn" themselves with beautiful titles becomes an expression of something fundamental; life as sisters and brothers in the community that has one heavenly father and one master teacher, Jesus. It is a life that would be destroyed by such "decoration" and the accompanying human striving for greatness.<sup>51</sup>

In these examples, Jesus' point seems to be this: the Pharisees had a particular craving for notoriety, for advancement beyond their peers, and for honor among men. Glory was the motivation for piety rather than love of God. Outward signs of holiness did not mirror an inner desire to please God. Perhaps worse than this, the Pharisees actually felt that God was impressed by those shows of piety—"that the distinctions that mattered among men mattered with the Almighty."<sup>52</sup> In response, Jesus says that a better way of

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<sup>48</sup> Moses Aberbach, "The Relations Between Master and Disciple in the Talmudic Age," *Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Brodie on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. H. J. Zimmels (London: Sonico, 1965). Cited in Albright and Mann, 279.

<sup>49</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 474.

<sup>50</sup> Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 196.

<sup>51</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 107.

<sup>52</sup> Haddon Robinson, "Good Guys, Bad Guys, and Us Guys" (sermon, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, August, 1992).

conducting oneself is to serve others rather than being served. Jesus advises the Pharisees to humble themselves, for “whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (v.12).

### **Pharisees obstruct the way to God.**

*13"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.*

*--Matthew 23:13<sup>53</sup>*

In verse 13, Jesus introduces two words which will each be used seven times in the following verses: “woe” and “hypocrites.” “Woe” is a term that “can be a compassionate ‘alas!’ (24:19), a strong condemnation (11:21), or a combination of the two (18:17; 26:24). In Matthew 23 condemnation predominates; but it is neither vindictive nor spiteful so much as judicial. Jesus the Messiah pronounces judgment.”<sup>54</sup> “Hypocrite” in older Greek meant “actor” but by the first century referred to “those who play roles and see the world as their stage.”<sup>55</sup> However, hypocrisy is not restricted to the conscious act of appearing to be someone you are not. David E. Garland explains:

In one instance, hypocrisy can be malicious (eg.: Luke 20:19-26); and the hypocrite is more aware of the hypocrisy than anyone else. In another instance, the hypocrite may be quite oblivious of his own sins (eg.: Matt 7:3-5); while almost everyone else is more cognizant of the hypocrisy than the hypocrite. It is the latter that seems to be most prominent in Matthew’s gospel. That is, what is called hypocrisy does not seem to be the calculated mimicry of religious sincerity in order to shield from view an inner godlessness. And, many commentators have understood the charge of hypocrisy in Matthew to imply an *objectiver Existenz* or *Selbstwiderspruch* viewed from the perspective of God.<sup>56</sup>

In other words, the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees “is not so much between what they want other people to think about them and what in fact they are; but between what

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<sup>53</sup> Parallel passage- Luke 11:52.

<sup>54</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 477.

<sup>55</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 164.

<sup>56</sup> David E. Garland. *The Intention of Matthew 23* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1979),

they think of themselves and what God thinks of them.”<sup>57</sup>

As hypocrites, the Pharisees believed they were helping people to come to God. Yet Jesus says that they “shut off the kingdom of heaven from people.” In a scripture regarded as a parallel passage, Luke writes: “Woe to you lawyers! You have carried off the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves and have hindered those who would enter” (11:52).<sup>58</sup> To combine Matthew and Luke’s renderings, the Pharisees had the key to the kingdom of heaven but kept it from the masses and did not use the key to enter the kingdom themselves. Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes,

Whereas the Matthean form of this saying (23:13) speaks of the Scribes and Pharisees locking up the “kingdom of heaven” (which may have well been the “Q” form), Luke’s saying is devoid of any reference to the kingdom, although it is often so interpreted. Because Luke’s form also speaks of people wanting to “enter,” it seems his form of the saying is alluding to Wisdom’s house (Prov 9:1). This would mean wisdom in a broad sense, referring to God’s salvific plan.<sup>59</sup>

Reiling and Swellengrebel agree concerning “the keys of knowledge,” saying this phrase “is best understood metaphorically as the key that opens the way to the understanding of Scripture which is the way of salvation.”<sup>60</sup> The Jews had confidence that the Pharisees, who were learned scholars of the scripture, were interpreting the law correctly. Yet, Jesus seems to be saying “the experts in the law have the wrong interpretation of the Old Testament and this makes it impossible for them to find salvation.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> J. C. Fenton, *The Gospel of Saint Matthew* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963). Quoted in Garland, 103.

<sup>58</sup> “The term *nomikos* is probably only a synonym for *grammateus*, ‘scribe.’” Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 676.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 951.

<sup>60</sup> J. Reiling and J. L. Swellengrebel, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Luke* (London: United Bibles Societies, 1971), 458-459.

<sup>61</sup> Reiling and Swellengrebel, *Gospel of Luke*, 459.

This “keeping from the kingdom” that the Pharisees were guilty of had two dimensions. First, through their legalistic interpretations of scripture, they were misleading their followers down the path of rigid legalism that prevented them from entering into the salvation of God by grace through faith. Second, through wrong exegesis regarding Old Testament messianic prophesies, they were preventing their followers from receiving their promised Messiah.<sup>62</sup> Carson writes, “the Pharisee’s teaching locked (their converts) into a theological frame that left no room for Jesus the Messiah and therefore no possibility of entering the messianic kingdom.”<sup>63</sup> What is more, through obtuseness to Jesus they distracted the crowds from pursuing their first impulse which was to follow Jesus as Messiah.<sup>64</sup> As interpreters of the law and prophets for the people of Israel, the scribes and Pharisees have failed their followers and heaped damnation on themselves for they “do not enter in themselves.”

Therefore the criticism of Jesus was somber. The scribes and Pharisees were not simply overly conscience or deeply conservative, they were negligent in their duty to make the path of salvation clear and easy to follow. Their teachings were not simply wrong, but they were damnably wrong. The Pharisees were destroying the lives of their followers by keeping them from the Redeemer of God.

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<sup>62</sup> Norvel Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 344-45.

<sup>63</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 479.

<sup>64</sup> “When the crowds openly marvel at the exorcisms of Jesus (‘Never was anything like this seen in Israel’), the Pharisees pronounce that he works through the prince of demons (9:33-34; cf. 9:3). As it begins to dawn on the crowds that this Jesus might be ‘the son of David’ because of his healing powers, the Pharisees explain once again that it is only by Beelzebub that Jesus cast out demons (12:23-24). The chief priests and the scribes react with indignation when Jesus is saluted by the crowds in the Temple, and they attempt to nip such misled enthusiasm in the bud (21:15). . . . It is not the false existence of the scribes and Pharisees which imperils the lives of men, but their false teaching which refused to recognize the significance of Jesus’ ministry (‘a glutton and drunkard’, 11:19) and as a consequence barred entry into the kingdom which he announced (cf. 16:6, 12).” Garland, *Intention*, 128-129.



## Pharisees use their reputations for profit.

<sup>14</sup>["Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation."] <sup>65</sup>

--Matthew 23:14<sup>66</sup>

The exact meaning of the phrase "devour widow' houses" is not clear. Fitzmyer gives six possible meanings before giving a somewhat hesitant opinion that the scribes are being accused of defrauding widows while acting as guardians of their estates.<sup>67</sup>

Leon Morris is more certain that verse 14 refers to scribes, who were forbidden to accept money for teaching, yet encourage "impressionable widows to make gifts beyond their means."<sup>68</sup> Joel Marcus puts forth another possibility traced to Josephus' writings,<sup>69</sup> suggesting that this passage refers to the "forcible seizure of property by priests, who are also scribes, for nonpayment of tithes,"<sup>70</sup> although this explanation is not widely regarded by commentators.

It is worth noticing that Jesus follows his statement about defrauding widows with a condemnation of the scribes and Pharisee's habit of praying long public prayers. What is the connection? I. Howard Marshall provides an answer by suggesting that "the long

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<sup>65</sup> Verse 14 "must be taken as an interpolation, derived from Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47. This is made clear, not only by its absence from the best and earliest Matthew MSS, but from the fact that the MSS that do include it divide on where to place it—before or after v. 13." Carson, *Matthew*, 477.

<sup>66</sup> Parallel passages- Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47.

<sup>67</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke (X-XXIV)*, 1318. (a) Scribes accepted payment for legal aid to widows, even though such payment was forbidden. (b) Scribes cheated widows out of what was rightly theirs; as lawyers, they were acting as guardians appointed by a husband's will to care for the widow's estate. (c) Scribes sponged on the hospitality of these women of limited means, like gluttons and gourmands. (d) Scribes mismanaged the property of the widows like Anna who had dedicated themselves to the service of the temple. (e) Scribes took large sums of money from credulous old women as a reward for the prolonged prayer which they professed to make on their behalf. (f) Scribes took the houses as pledges for debts which could not be paid.

<sup>68</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 294.

<sup>69</sup> Josephus, *Ant.*, XX, ix., 2, trans. Louis H Feldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). Josephus speaks of the servants of Ananias, the high priest who "would go to the threshing floors and take by force the tithes of the priests." However, it seems a stretch to make the scribes and Pharisees co-conspirators with those who did the bidding of the high priest.

<sup>70</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 856.

prayers were said publicly in order to give an impression of piety and trustworthiness and so to induce people to trust them.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, the Pharisees prayed long, public prayers because it was good for business. The prayers created a reputation for integrity which elicited trust from the observers.

Again, Jesus’ pointed accusation directed against the Pharisees is that of hypocrisy. Behind their piety lies inner darkness. This accusation made by Jesus is particularly piercing because transgression or defrauding of widows is an especially heinous crime in the Old Testament (Jer 7:6-7; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10-14; Mal 3:5).<sup>72</sup> The Pharisees have kept a part of the law (prayer) but neglected the matters of the law that have equal or greater weight (mercy and love for neighbors).

**Pharisees are evangelistic for their own cause.**

*<sup>15</sup>“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*

*--Matthew 23:15*

Jesus begins with what seems to be a compliment that turns into a condemnation. In the previous verse, the Pharisees’ prayer lives are noted but their motives are condemned. Here, their evangelistic zeal is noted but Jesus declares their conversion successes to be faulty. Instead of being children of God, their converts are turned into the “sons of hell.”

This is the sole reference in scripture to evangelistic efforts on the part of Pharisees. Its reference is unclear and “the question to what extent ancient Judaism was engaged in actively recruiting converts is unresolved.”<sup>73</sup> A scholar who spent

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<sup>71</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 750.

<sup>72</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 856.

<sup>73</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 117.

considerable time investigating this topic was Louis H. Feldman. He writes that while “there is admittedly no indication in extant literature of organized efforts by the Pharisees to gain converts . . . neither is there evidence of organized opposition to such efforts.”<sup>74</sup>

Feldman notes that the early church fathers reported that Jewish proselytizing was happening in subsequent centuries. He writes,

In the middle of the third century, the great church father Origen, who lived in Caesarea in the Land of Israel, commenting on the bitter saying ascribed to Jesus (Matt 23:15) that the Pharisees traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, indicates that proselytism by the Jews is still being actively carried on; and he, like Justin Martyr, reports that proselytes to Judaism are often more severe critics of Christianity than born Jews. He insists that the “Judaizing” tendencies within the Christian community are not always spontaneous but that, on the contrary, they are the work of Jewish missionaries.<sup>75</sup>

It is no stretch to assume that if the Jews were evangelizing in the third century, they were doing so in the first century. Josephus provides one such account while speaking of two noblemen, subjects of Agrippa II. He writes that the “Jews would have compelled them to be circumcised as a condition of residence among them. I, however, would not allow any compulsion to be put upon them.”<sup>76</sup> In another account, Josephus records the conversion of King Izates by a Jewish merchant who led the king “to worship God after the manner of the Jewish tradition”.<sup>77</sup> Further, Feldman notes that Jewish merchants often doubled as missionaries.<sup>78</sup> It is suffice to say that Jewish missionary activity was taking place in the first century and would almost certainly have been happening among the Pharisees.

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<sup>74</sup> Louis H. Feldman, *Jews and Gentiles in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interaction from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 332.

<sup>75</sup> Feldman, *Jews and Gentiles*, 402.

<sup>76</sup> Josephus, *The Life*, 113, trans. H. ST. J. Thackeray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>77</sup> Josephus, *Ant. XX, II, 3*, trans. Louis H. Feldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>78</sup> Feldman, *Jews and Gentiles*, 402.

A question that then arises is “who exactly were the Pharisees evangelizing—Gentiles or other Jews?” Some are adamant that the term “proselyte” denotes Gentiles.<sup>79</sup> Others are not so certain.<sup>80</sup> What is agreed upon is that the Pharisees were zealous to win converts to their own sect, not simply to Judaism or the worship of Yahweh. As D. A. Carson writes, “whether the scribes and Pharisees were winning raw pagans or sympathizers of Judaism, they were winning them to their own position.”<sup>81</sup> The converts were students of the Pharisees.

Important to recognize is the energy that the Pharisees exerted to win a convert. It must not have been easy to convert a person to their lifestyle. They had to look far and wide, to cross “sea and land” (v. 15) to make a convert. Yet they were willing to go. They did find people willing to convert to their way of thinking and living. However, in the eyes of Jesus, this made them double sons of Gehenna compared to their teachers. The proselyte was twice as damnable because he was twice as careful to observe the commandments of his teachers.<sup>82</sup> In essence, the proselytes were even more zealous than their teachers, “out-phariseeing” the Pharisees.<sup>83</sup> This has often been reenacted for “when such legalism does succeed in securing a convert, the history of Christianity and Judaism alike is evidence enough for the extremes to which the zeal of the convert for his new faith may drive him.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Luz, 118; Robert H Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 461.

<sup>80</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 478.

<sup>81</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 478.

<sup>82</sup> Feldman, *Jews and Gentiles*, 338.

<sup>83</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 479.

<sup>84</sup> Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 280.

**Pharisees trivialize important aspects of God's law.**

<sup>16</sup>"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.'

<sup>17</sup>"You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?

<sup>18</sup>"And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.'

<sup>19</sup>"You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?

<sup>20</sup>"Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it.

<sup>21</sup>"And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.

<sup>22</sup>"And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

--Matthew 23:16-22

One of the fundamental problems with creating your own laws is that you inevitably deemphasize laws that should be paramount. In the fourth "woe," Jesus attacks the Pharisees for trivializing oaths, or to be more transparent, playing with the truth. The point at issue is their categorizing oaths as binding or not binding. According to Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock, the intent was probably to prevent people from making casual oaths. It was an attempt to force people to take their oaths more seriously by dictating that some oaths were absolutely binding and could not be broken. However, this led to hairsplitting as the Pharisees began to look for loopholes in law.<sup>85</sup>

According to the scribes and Pharisees, "'by heaven,' or 'by earth' do not 'bind' one who swears. Similarly . . . the formula 'by the Torah' also is not binding . . . while it is probably binding if one is more precise and swears 'by what is written in the Torah.'"<sup>86</sup> In verse 18, a man who swears by the altar is not under obligation, but one who swears by the offering he places on the altar is bound by his word. In response, Jesus "insists that

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<sup>85</sup> Boring and Craddock, *People's Commentary*, 90.

<sup>86</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 120.

whatever a man swears by is related to God in some way, and therefore every oath is implicitly in God's name."<sup>87</sup> Whoever swears, "swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it" (v. 22).

Jesus says that instead of making oaths, we should have a reputation for honesty regardless of whether we speak with the forcefulness of an oath. "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No,'" Jesus says (Matt 5:37).<sup>88</sup> The point Jesus makes is that we ought to speak the truth whether we are under oath or not.<sup>89</sup>

It is useful to note in passing that the Pharisees believed themselves to be advanced in learning because they could distinguish the minutiae of the law. However, Jesus called them "fools and blind guides" (v. 16) a direct challenge to their authority to lead the people in spiritual matters.

#### **Pharisees emphasize lesser important aspects of God's law.**

*<sup>23</sup>"Woe"<sup>90</sup> to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.*

*<sup>24</sup>"You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"*

*--Matthew 23:23-24<sup>91</sup>*

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<sup>87</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 154.

<sup>88</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 154. This does not mean that we are forbidden to make oaths when necessary. "In Scriptures God "swears" (Gen. 9:9-11; Luke 1:68, 73, cf. Ps. 16:10, and Acts 2:27-31), not because he sometimes lies, but in order to help men believe (Heb. 6:17). The earliest Christians still took oaths, if we may judge from Paul's example (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10; cg. Phil. 1:8), for the same reason. Jesus himself testified under oath (26:63-64)."

<sup>89</sup> William Barclay, *Matthew*, Vol. 2, 323. Barclay says this passage is likely a "*reductio ad absurdum* of Jewish methods than a literal description of them." However, this seems to overlook the capacity of human nature itself to categorize their oaths. For instance, a signature on a sign-up sheet to attend an activity is often broken in my congregation. A verbal commitment to the pastor is not as quickly broken while a public vow is hardly ever broken.

<sup>90</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 480. According to Carson, there is a "chiastic structure" with the seven "woes." If this is the case, the fourth "woe" here provides the center of the chiasm, bearing the weight of emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> Parallel passage- Luke 11:37-44.

Jesus again brings up the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. They concern themselves with minor details regarding tithing, appearing to be concerned with keeping the law. Yet, they neglect weightier issues—justice, mercy, and faithfulness—bringing into question their true loyalty to the commandments of God. This neglect causes them to “fail to live up to the basic requirements of God’s covenant.”<sup>92</sup>

Here in Matthew, Jesus says that the scribes and Pharisees tithe mint, dill, and cummin. In the Lucan passage, the Pharisees tithe “mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs” (11:42). Whether all of these crops were required to be tithed is unclear. Mint is included by Matthew and Luke but there is no record that it was to be tithed. Dill was to be tithed but there is a question about rue and cummin.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Jesus may be pointing out that the Pharisees tithe far beyond what is required.<sup>94</sup> However, he may also have in mind the scrupulous manner in which they tithe. They have gone far beyond Moses in diligently regulating what, when, and how tithes are to be offered to the Temple.

A small sample of the emphasis placed on scrupulous tithing is provided by Darrell L. Bock and Gregory J. Herrick who translate a portion of Maasroth<sup>95</sup> 4.5:

- A. One who husks barley removes the husks [from the kernels] one by one, and eats [without tithing].
- B. But if he husked [a few kernels] and placed [them] in his hand, he is required [to tithe].
- C. One who eats husks parched kernels of wheat sifts [the kernels] from hand to hand, and eats [without tithing].

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<sup>92</sup> Garland, *Intention*, 141.

<sup>93</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 497.

<sup>94</sup> Neusner, *Invitation*, 22-23. Neusner writes that “the Pharisees separated themselves from other Jews by paying the tithes and offerings to the Jewish Temple, something the law of Moses mandated but Rome did not enforce.” This may have factored into their air of superiority.

<sup>95</sup> Strack, *Introduction*, 29. The Maasroth is the seventh of 63 tractates of the Mishna according to the Order of Moses Maimonides.

D. But if he sifted [the kernels] and placed [them] inside his shirt, he is required [to tithe].

E. Coriander which [the farmer] sowed [in order to harvest its] seed [for future sowing]—its leaves are exempt [from the removal of tithes if they are eaten].

F. [If he] sowed it [in order to harvest its] leaves [for use as an herb]—[both] the seeds and the leaves are subject to the law of tithes.<sup>96</sup>

One can well see why Jesus says the Pharisees strain to keep small commandments. Yet, this is not condemned by Jesus because tithing was an Old Testament principle.<sup>97</sup> The point of contention is that they have neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness (*justice* and *the love of God* in Luke). Justice is “no doubt to be understood of social relationships: the Pharisees are indifferent to the rights of the poor.”<sup>98</sup> Wessel suggests that if the Pharisees were in fact tithing more than the law demanded, then “they were tithing possessions that they should have shared with (or rightfully belonged to) the needy.”<sup>99</sup> Thus, for Luke they do not show *agape* love to the needy that should have been paramount in their endeavors. Matthew uses *eleos* (literally “compassion”) instead of *agape* to drive this neglect of the poor home to his readers. *Pistis* here means “fidelity” as it is often used in the Old Testament.<sup>100</sup>

The force of Jesus’ statement comes in the hyperbole of verse 24, when he compares the Pharisee’s concern for exact accuracy in tithing while neglecting the weightier matters to that of “straining out a gnat while swallowing a camel.” Ulrich Luz says that a gnat was often found in a cup of wine but would be strained out though it could hardly do any damage. A camel was one of the largest animals, and was unclean to

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<sup>96</sup> Darrell L. Bock and Gregory J. Herrick, *Jesus in Context: Background Readings for Gospel Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 164.

<sup>97</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 498.

<sup>98</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 497.

<sup>99</sup> Walter W. Wessel, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 956.

<sup>100</sup> Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 232.



the Jew.<sup>101</sup> The picture is of a person who works hard to avoid consuming something that won't hurt him while eating something that would surely make him unclean.

Again, Jesus points out the misguided piety of the Pharisees who at some level, desire to please God. To please God, they rigidly strive in the details, neglecting the things that most concern God. For Jesus, their attention to detail is not only useless but ridiculous; far from being admirable (which for us it often is) it is spiritual blindness.

**Pharisees are more concerned about appearing outwardly holy than inner purity.**

*<sup>25</sup>"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.*

*<sup>26</sup>"You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.*

*<sup>27</sup>"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.*

*<sup>28</sup>"So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

*--Matthew 23:25-28<sup>102</sup>*

The parallel passage given in Luke 11 provides the setting of these verses; Jesus is dining in the home of a Pharisee. Jesus' dialogue begins when the Pharisee notices that Jesus has forgone the ritualistic hand-washing required by the Pharisees before eating. The importance of this ritual, trivial to us, cannot be understated. Again, it was through these priestly observances that Israel would achieve her destiny of becoming a kingdom of priests.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 124.

<sup>102</sup> Parallel passages- Mark 7:3-5, 8; Luke 11:37-44.

<sup>103</sup> "The Pharisee held . . . that even outside of the Temple, in one's own home, one had to follow the laws of ritual purity in the only circumstance in which they might effectively apply, namely, at the table. They therefore held you must eat secular food, that is, ordinary, everyday meals in a state of ritual purity as if you were a Temple priest." Neusner, *Invitation*, 20.

In response to his host's question, Jesus accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy. In this context, hypocrisy clearly means displaying an outward image that was not reflective of an inward reality. Specifically, that "their inside does not reflect the concern for cleanliness which they show in their externals."<sup>104</sup> Marshall seconds this rather obvious interpretation saying, "the Pharisees were concerned with trivialities, and ignored the justice and love of God which should have been primary. They were filled with pride and self-importance as religious teachers. All of these were inward sins."<sup>105</sup> To drive this point home, Jesus gave two illustrations to compare the lives of the Pharisees: a bowl that is washed on the outside but left dirty on the inside, and sepulchers that are freshly painted on the outside but contain a corpse.<sup>106</sup>

The picture could not be clearer. The Pharisees have cleansed themselves outwardly but have neglected the inward cleansing. They act as though what a man does is more important, while Jesus is clearly more concerned with what a man is.<sup>107</sup> The implication is that "the inner disposition that leads to the plundering of neighbors (ignoring justice and mercy) must be cleansed before the external trappings of piety will have any significance before God."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 181.

<sup>105</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 491.

<sup>106</sup> Fitzmyer says these whitewashed tombs "refers to the yearly custom of whitewashing graves before Passover." However, Garland has pointed out that this is illogical for the tombs were whitewashed to keep people away. The paint warned people of the potential defilement for those traveling nearby. Therefore the whitewashed tombs advertised corruption rather than concealing. Thus, what is likely meant here are the "monuments that used to be erected over tombs" (i.e. like the Pharisees build for the prophets in v. 29). In the Lucan text, "whitewashed tombs" are replaced with "unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it" (11:44). Fitzmyer comments "because they are unmarked, people do not recognize them for what they are, and so unwittingly come into contact with them" leading to ritual defilement. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 949; Garland, *Intention*, 150-156.

<sup>107</sup> Morris, *St. Luke*, 203.

<sup>108</sup> Garland, *Intention*, 149.

It should be noted that Jesus neglects, and in so doing allows us to omit, the ritual of priestly hand washing before meals. However, in regards to the issue of tithing in verse 23 he says “these you ought to have done without omitting the others.” In other words, Jesus does not simply relieve the 21<sup>st</sup> century listener of all outward acts of obedience. He does not say “the inside is more important than the outside.” Rather he says stresses that “the inside is as important as the outside.” The point is this: ‘Did not he (the potter or God) who made the outside also make the inside (and therefore you must cleanse both)?’”<sup>109</sup>

**Pharisees persecute those sent by God.**

*<sup>29</sup>“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,*

*<sup>30</sup>and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’*

*<sup>31</sup>“So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.*

*<sup>32</sup>“Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.*

*<sup>33</sup>“You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?*

*<sup>34</sup>“Therefore, behold, I’m sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,*

*<sup>35</sup>so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.*

*<sup>36</sup>“Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*

*--Matthew 23:29-36*

Matthew seems to record Jesus’ harshest criticisms last, telling the Pharisees that they were the sons of murderers and will themselves do murder in the future.

Commenting on the self-deception that engulfed the Pharisees, Carson writes,

[They] thought themselves morally and spiritually above their forebears who had persecuted the prophets whose monuments they were building (v. 29). They believed they would not have joined their forebears in murdering the prophets

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<sup>109</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 495.

(v.30)—just as many Christians today naively think they would have responded better to Jesus than the disciples or the crowds that cried, “Crucify him!”<sup>110</sup>

The Pharisees were the moral heirs of their fathers because they will persecute the messengers that Jesus will be sending.<sup>111</sup> These are contemporary followers for Matthew who is writing after the fact.<sup>112</sup> Therefore they showed themselves to be obstructionists of the messengers of God as their forefathers were to the prophets. They “fill up . . . the measure of the guilt of their fathers” (v. 32)<sup>113</sup> and are guilty of fiery judgment, for “by the first century the word [Gehenna] was already used metaphorically as a picture of the fiery eschatological judgment of God.”<sup>114</sup>

In verse 35, Jesus says the Pharisees will be guilty for all the innocent blood on earth from “Abel” to “Zechariah, the son of Berechiah.” Why are Abel and Zechariah named? William Barclay suggests that Zechariah ben Berechiah is really Zechariah ben Jehoiada from 2 Chronicles 24:20-22, “a simple slip of the gospel writer in retelling the story.”<sup>115</sup> According to Barclay, the significance of these two names is this: while Genesis is the first book of both the Christian and Hebrew canons, while 2 Chronicles is the final book in the Hebrew canon. Thus, in the Hebrew canon, Abel was the first

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<sup>110</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 483.

<sup>111</sup> While here, in the Matthean text, Jesus promises to send “prophets and wise men and scribes,” in the Lucan text, Jesus promises to send “prophets and apostles” (11:49).

<sup>112</sup> Schweizer says “it must undoubtedly be dated some time after A. D. 70” but Luz cautions, saying “we may not date the Gospel of Matthew long after the year 80.” Schweizer, *According to Matthew*, 15; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 59.

<sup>113</sup> “There exists the widespread notion in the Old Testament that God allots to the nations their times (Dan 2:21), and in the course of that time they lay the foundations for their judgment. Cf. Gen 15:16 and Jub 14:16, ‘the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete’; Dan 4:34, ‘the sins of Nebuchadnezzar were fulfilled’; ‘the sins of the transgressors have been fulfilled’; and Enoch 50:2, ‘the day of affliction on which evil shall have been treasured up against the sinners’ . . . Matthew 23:32 is in accord with the notion that the sinners—in this case, the disobedient oppressors of God’s messengers—will continue with their sin until they are ripe for judgment; at that time, they will be a reckoning of accounts.” Garland, *Intention*, 168.

<sup>114</sup> Boring and Craddock, *People’s Commentary*, 91.

<sup>115</sup> Barclay, *Matthew*, Vol. 2, 329.

murdered and Zechariah was the last.<sup>116</sup>

The point Jesus is making regards the spirit of the Pharisees. They not only stood for something but strongly opposed those who got in their way. They are militant in their opposition, even using political means to attack their enemies. Josephus records that Salome Alexandra received deathbed advice from her husband Alexander Janneaus, then ruler of Judea to befriend the Pharisees “because these men have so much influence with their fellow Jews that they can injure those whom they hate and help those to whom they are friendly; for they have the complete confidence of the masses”<sup>117</sup> Taking his advice, Salome reached out to the Pharisees who took advantage of their new influence to kill many of their opponents.<sup>118</sup>

N. T Wright suggests that violence was the natural result of pharisaic thought. He writes,

Zeal for YHWH, the chief characteristic of the hard-line Shammaite Pharisees who formed the strongest Jewish pressure-group prior to AD 70, meant zeal for the Torah. One has only to read the books of the Maccabees to see what that meant. The heaven-sent law must be obeyed; there must be no compromise with the idolatrous ways of the nations. This law, moreover, must be defended; force must be used, where necessary, to protect the law and thus guard the life of the true Israel. . . . It was a matter of guarding Israel from paganization, and, more positively, attempting (if and when occasion allowed) to throw off the pagan yoke altogether. It was this agenda which, I suggest, brought Jesus into a head-on collision with the dominant Pharisaic movement of his day. For the Shammaite Pharisees, the coming kingdom of YHWH would be a matter of national liberation and the defeat of the pagans. For Jesus, the kingdom was an offer to those who would repent of just that aspiration. It was inevitable that the two would clash.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Barclay, *Matthew*, Vol. 2, 329-330.

<sup>117</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities XIII*, xv, 5, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

<sup>118</sup> Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 144-45.

<sup>119</sup> Wright, *Victory*, 384.

## **Summary of Matthew 23**

The Pharisees were a religious sect in first-century Judea who emerged in response to the national and religious decay that brought Israel to the brink of annihilation. They were concerned for the well-being of their people and wanted to see the nation fulfill their destiny by becoming a nation of priests. This vision, however, by the time of Jesus had become putrid. Instead of being a positive force of reformation, Jesus sees them as a negative element, leading the nation away from God. His list of charges is staggering.

The Pharisees:

- Exceeded their authority by making laws they had no right to make, however well intentioned. These Pharisaic laws put heavy burdens on the people and made it impossible for the common Jew to distinguish between Moses' law and the tradition of the Pharisees.
- Gloried in their piety rather than in the grace of God and used their reputations to pursue social status.
- Obstructed the way to God by misinterpreting scripture concerning salvation and the nature of the Messiah. They were negligent in their responsibility to make the way to God clear.
- Used their reputations for integrity to gain financial profit and social prestige.
- Were evangelistic but not for the sake of God. Rather, they evangelized people to themselves, turning their disciples into Pharisees that were more pharisaic than themselves.
- Trivialized important commands of God and emphasized commands of lesser importance.

- Stressed appearing pious above inner purity.
- Had a history of opposing and even persecuting the prophets sent by God. They could be vicious when they had the power to inflict damage on their opponents.

### ***Jesus' Dual Message to the Pharisees***

#### **Pharisees needed to be reminded that they were in desperate need of grace.**

A dominant theme found in Matthew 23 is the Pharisee's need for grace. Each "woe" forcefully declares that the righteousness the Pharisees believe they possess will not be enough to overt the judgment of God. While they do many things right, their failures threaten to damn them. In essence, Jesus speaks of grace to the Pharisees, but in negative terms. Instead of focusing on God's glorious offer of grace, Jesus hammers home the great need of grace, given the Pharisee's inner unrighteousness.

This pattern is apparent in Jesus' conversations with Pharisees. For instance, in John 3:1-21, Jesus was visited nocturnally by Nicodemus, a high-ranking Pharisee. Politely but swiftly, Jesus "sweeps away all that Nicodemus stood for, and demands that he be remade by the power of God."<sup>120</sup> In other words, Jesus began by telling Nicodemus that all he had achieved morally fell far short of what was necessary to enter the kingdom of God. He would have to be entirely reborn or recreated by the power of God. Whatever Nicodemus had to offer by way of righteousness, the grace of God was still required before he could enter the kingdom of God.

In John 8:1-11, Jesus was confronted by a group of scribes and Pharisees who ask

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<sup>120</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 212.

him to pass judgment on a woman caught in the act of adultery.<sup>121</sup> After telling Jesus that the law of Moses required that she be stoned, they asked Jesus for his opinion. This was clearly a trap for “if he decides the case in favor of the woman and releases her, he violates the clear prescriptions of the Mosaic law; if he orders her to be stoned, he will be in trouble with the Romans.”<sup>122</sup> Jesus deliberated by stooping down and writing in the dust.<sup>123</sup> Then brilliantly he addressed the Pharisees saying, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). As he continued to write in the dirt, the Pharisees turned and left, one by one. Leon Morris comments, that “when the force of Jesus’ words struck home they were no longer interested in her sin, but in their own.”<sup>124</sup> Merrill C. Tenney humourously suggests that the Pharisees began to leave “beginning with the older ones” because “the older ones either had more sins for which they were answerable or else had more sense than to make an impossible profession of righteousness.”<sup>125</sup> Once again, Jesus encountered the Pharisees by pointing out their sins and, by connotation, their complete inability to stand before God based on their own righteousness apart from grace.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> The authenticity of this passage has long been disputed by biblical scholars. Morris writes that “it is impossible that this section is an authentic part of the Gospel” and only offers commentary on it in his Appendix. However, he adds “but if we cannot feel that this is part of John’s Gospel we can feel that the story is true to the character of Jesus. Throughout the history of the church it has been held that, whoever wrote it, this little story is authentic,” Morris, *John*, 882-883.

<sup>122</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 337.

<sup>123</sup> For a complete discussion of what Jesus might have written, see Brown, *John I-XII*, 333-334.

<sup>124</sup> Morris, *John*, 890.

<sup>125</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: John*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981,) 90-91.

<sup>126</sup> “This is not an absolute and simple prohibition, in which Christ forbids sinners to do their duty in correcting the sins of others. But by this word, he only reproves hypocrites, who gently flatter themselves and their own vices, but are excessively severe and even savage judges of others. . . . Every man should begin by interrogating his own conscience and be both witness and judge against himself before he comes to others.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John, 1-10*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1961), 207-208.



This pattern is repeated in Luke 18:18-26 when Jesus is approached by a man commonly referred to as the rich, young ruler.<sup>127</sup> The young man wants to know what he must “do” to inherit eternal life (v. 18). Jesus tells him that he ought to keep the Ten Commandments, to which the man testifies that he has done this since he was a youth. In response, Jesus tells him that he is still lacking what it takes and tells him to “sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (v. 22).

The point Jesus makes is that this young man has not kept the Ten Commandments. His response to Jesus’s final request demonstrates that the young man is “still engaged all the time in trying to serve God along with Mammon.”<sup>128</sup> Walter L. Liefeld explains the intent of Jesus’s request in verse 22:

Jesus now moves to the heart of the tenth commandment by leading the ruler to face his attitude toward his possessions. Paul recognized his sinfulness when he became aware of the thrust of the command against covetousness (Rom 7:7-8). In Colossians 3:5 he said that greed is idolatry. The ruler had broken the first commandment by breaking the last.<sup>129</sup>

Norvel Geldenhuys points out that the young man stumbles when he asks Jesus what he must “do.” Regarding this passage, he comments,

If a man throughout his whole life observes the commandments of God without any failure or deviation, he will inherit eternal life. No one, however, except Jesus, has ever been able, or will ever be able in this life, to be so perfect. And

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<sup>127</sup> Darrell L. Bock believes that the rich, young ruler was a Pharisee. He writes: “Luke’s use of the word *achon* is important for he often uses this term to describe rulers of the Pharisees, a group he sees negatively. Luke refers to such rulers six times in his Gospel (8:41; 14:1; 23:13, 35; 24:20) and eleven times in Acts, often as part of the leadership that stands opposed to Jesus.” Raymond Brown identifies this young ruler as a member of the Sanhedrin. This does not definitively identify this man as a Pharisee, as the Sanhedrin was composed of Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6). However, it does raise the probability, as this young man seems to fit the pharisaic mold. It should be noted that Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee, is also identified as a “ruler” (Jn 3:1). Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Volume 2: 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1476; Brown, *John I-XII*, 138.

<sup>128</sup> Brown, *John I-XII*, 138.

<sup>129</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 1003.

because God's Word teaches that everyone, even if he should transgress only one commandment, is guilty in the sight of God, the only way to redemption is the way of grace. . . . So if the man desires to know what he must *do* he can only be referred to the Ten Commandments.<sup>130</sup>

Thus, as with Nicodemus, and the pharisaic mob, the rich, young ruler is shown that he falls short of moral perfection and must rely on grace; and as in the previous cases, Jesus drives this point home by emphasizing the man's moral failures that result in his desperate need of grace rather than the beauty of grace.

### **Pharisees needed to understand the nature of the kingdom of God.**

A second theme that Jesus used to address pharisaism was the nature of the kingdom of God. The message of the kingdom was a primary theme in Jesus' preaching,<sup>131</sup> and because much of Jesus' teaching was directed to the Pharisees, it was also a primary theme in their confrontations as well.<sup>132</sup> As Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God he was "deliberately evoking an entire story-line that he and his hearers knew quite well" but "was retelling this familiar story in such a way as to subvert and redirect its normal plot."<sup>133</sup> N. T. Wright summarizes the radical way in which the Gospels talk about the kingdom of God. He writes,

Within this redefined but still thoroughly Jewish-monotheistic vision of the kingdom we find the most remarkable redefinitions. At the level of worldview, the regular Jewish symbols are completely missing. The story of the new movement is told without reference to the national, racial, or geographical liberation of Israel. The praxis of the kingdom (holiness) is defined without reference to Torah. The answers to the worldview questions can be given in terms of a redeemed humanity and cosmos, rather than in terms simply of Israel and her national hope. This picture, which could be amplified in detail in terms of a study of early Christianity as a whole, can be seen in reference to specific 'kingdom'

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<sup>130</sup> Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 458.

<sup>131</sup> "'The kingdom of God' is the most common topic of Jesus' teaching in the Synoptic Gospels." Morris, *St. Luke*, 213.

<sup>132</sup> Ronald N. Hesser, *The Pharisee in Us All* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2007), ix. Hesser states that "over one third of the Gospels involve situations where Jesus was either speaking to the Pharisees or referencing their behavior."

<sup>133</sup> Wright, *Victory*, 199.

texts, as follows. John stresses that Jesus' kingdom is 'not of this world', distinguishing it explicitly (in context) from the kingdom sought by Jewish revolutionaries of the time.<sup>134</sup>

In other words, Jesus redefined the Pharisee's doctrine of the kingdom of God, which they understood to be a time of national vengeance. Rather, Jesus described the kingdom as a time of inclusion that would lead to the redemption of humanity, not simple Israel. The Pharisees anticipated the kingdom to be a "matter of national liberation and the defeat of the pagans. For Jesus, the kingdom was an offer to those who would repent of just that aspiration."<sup>135</sup> According to Wright, this was the primary point of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees. He writes,

The objection (of the Pharisees) did not arise because Jesus was teaching or propagating a different religious system; nor because he was letting wicked people carry on with their sin and pretending all was well; nor because Jesus, as a private individual, was associating with people who were 'beyond the pale'. There is no reason to suppose that Pharisees, or anyone else, spied out ordinary people who were 'associating' with 'sinners' and angrily objected to them doing so. Accusations were leveled, rather, because this welcome to sinners was being offered precisely by someone announcing the kingdom of God, and, moreover, offering this welcome as itself a vital part of that kingdom. The question was not about the sinners, or the moral or theological niceties of whether they had repented, and, if so, in what sense. It was about the scandalous implied redefinition of the kingdom itself. Jesus was replacing adherence or allegiance to the Temple and Torah with allegiance to himself. Restoration and purity were to be had, not through the usual channels, but through Jesus.<sup>136</sup>

Harold Ballard concurs with Wright, writing,

Rather than targeting a righteous remnant for inclusion in the kingdom, he welcomed sinners freely. An unprecedented time of salvation had dawned in which God was restoring Israel not by purging the wicked but by offering forgiveness to any and all, a sort of general amnesty, so to speak. Occasionally, Jesus is reported to have said directly 'Your sins are forgiven' (Mark 2:5; Luke 7:48), meaning 'God has forgiven them.' More frequently, forgiveness is portrayed in word pictures: rejoicing over finding something that was lost (Luke 15:5-6, 9, 23-24); large and small debts being freely canceled (Matthew 18:27;

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<sup>134</sup> Wright, *Victory*, 218.

<sup>135</sup> Wright, *Victory*, 384.

<sup>136</sup> Wright, *Victory*, 273-74.

Luke 7:42); the sinful tax collector being justified rather than the pious Pharisee (Luke 18:14). Jesus told the chief priests and elders, 'the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you' (Matthew 21:31). He told the Pharisees, 'I have come to call not the righteous but sinners (Mark 2:17). . . Nobody enters the kingdom by qualifying through righteous deeds; entrance is only by accepting God's forgiveness.'<sup>137</sup>

Likewise Stanley Grenz says,

Our Lord disagreed with the Jewish leaders he encountered about who actually are the people of God. The Pharisees and scribes viewed themselves as the truly righteous ones with whom God was pleased. They were righteous because they obeyed the strictures of Jewish piety and followed the law to the letter. Jesus, in contrast, proclaimed that God's people are not those who appear to be righteous, but the ones who are penitent. God accepts those who humble themselves and cry for mercy; God rejects the proud who claim they have no need of forgiveness.<sup>138</sup>

To summarize, in speaking about the kingdom of God, Jesus forcefully informed the Pharisees that the kingdom was much more inclusive and larger than they could imagine. God was in the process of redeeming peoples that they had discarded and declaring righteous, persons they had classified as "sinners." In his declarations, Jesus undermined the Pharisee's idealistic belief that the kingdom of God would be characterized as a people who observed priestly piety.

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<sup>137</sup>Harold W. Ballard, Jr., Donald N. Penny, W. Glenn Jonas, Jr., and Dean M. Martin, *A Journey of Faith: An Introduction to Christianity* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 84-85.

<sup>138</sup> Stanley Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 107.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In his interesting little book entitled *The Pharisees' Guide to Total Holiness*, William Coleman warns the reader to “beware, because if he is anything like the author, he will be tempted to pick out a contemporary group and say ‘Aha! These are modern Pharisees.’ It is fools sport at best. There is in fact no group today that is identical to the Pharisees.”<sup>1</sup> Coleman is probably right. It would be tedious at best and hardly rewarding to sort through the various Christian denominations and sects to identify those people who bear an exact resemblance to the first century Pharisees. The more important achievement is to realize that in every congregation a minister is likely to serve, there are persons that possess pharisaic tendencies and ways of thinking. The soil in which pharisaism grows still lies fertile today. This chapter will attempt to dissect the pharisaic line of reasoning which informs pharisaic behavior. The intended result is for the reader to understand how the Pharisee’s unique self-image shapes their behavior. In turn, this will enable the minister to address the essence of pharisaism rather than speak to peripheral behaviors.

#### ***The Essence of Pharisaism***

Writers have divergent opinions when speaking of the essential nature of pharisaism. John Fischer speaks for many when he assumes the main motive of pharisaism is a drive to feel an inner sense of moral superiority. He writes: “It is the creed of the Pharisee to be better than everyone else and to devise means of measuring and

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Coleman, *The Pharisees Guide to Total Holiness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1977), 3.

comparing that support that assessment.”<sup>2</sup> A few paragraphs later he adds,

It’s the Pharisee in us that wants control, and more than anything we want control over the rules of the game. . . . We set a standard that some, but not all, are capable of achieving. . . . For today’s Pharisee, certain cultural taboos serve the . . . purpose, such as smoking, drinking, dancing, and attending R-rated movies, for instance. Abstaining from these things appears sacrificial, but most modern-day Pharisees don’t want to do any of these things anyway. This system cleverly enables us to follow the law perfectly (as we have interpreted it) while passing judgment on all those who don’t follow it, can’t follow it, or who simply couldn’t care less about our little charade.”<sup>3</sup>

Fischer continues to reinforce this thesis throughout his work. Thus, the first five steps in his twelve step recovery program are given to address judgmental attitudes and the need for controlling the definition of righteousness for personal glory.<sup>4</sup>

John Elzinga seems to second Fischer’s opinion. He writes, “I am a Pharisee when I set up precise standards of actions which I have determined equate to righteousness, holiness, and obedience; and judge others in relationship to my own ability to meet those standards [even when I use scripture].”<sup>5</sup> Larry Hart essentially concurs when he writes,

We may yield to a pride *of power*, in which we attempt to control people and situations. Abuse of power is one of the salient sins of humankind. Or we might, in pride *of knowledge*, refuse to acknowledge our intellectual limitations and seek to absolutize our worldview. Somehow, if we can convince others that we know more than they, we feel more secure and righteous. . . . This points us to the third manifestation of pride, the most dangerous of all: pride *of virtue or religion*. The Pharisees of Scripture are a prime example of this sin. Attempting to prove our spiritual and moral superiority is one of the most destructive sins of all.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Fischer, *12 Steps for the Recovering Pharisee* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2000), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Fischer, *12 Steps*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Fischer, *12 Steps*, 8. Step 1: We admit that our single most unmitigated pleasure is to judge other people; Step 2: Have come to believe that our means of obtaining greatness is to make everyone lower than ourselves in our own mind; Step 3: Realize that we detest mercy being given to those who, unlike us, haven’t worked for it and don’t deserve it; Step 4: Have decided that we don’t want to get what we deserve after all, and we don’t want anyone else to either; Step 5: Will cease all attempts to apply teaching and rebuke to anyone but ourselves.

<sup>5</sup> John Elzinga, *Thank God I’m Not a Pharisee . . . or am I?* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Larry D. Hart, *Truth Aflame*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 265.

An understanding of pharisaism that has deep roots in Protestantism is to equate the essence of pharisaism with a doctrine of justification by works. Daniel R. Schwartz writes that in Protestantism, "Pharisaism was characterized by 'Werkheiligkeit' – the notion that one's works can make him holy. . . . Protestants since Luther (who apparently coined the term) had always attacked Catholics for subscribing to that low notion, and the Catholics threw the shibboleth at the Pharisees."<sup>7</sup> However, recent theologians such as E. P. Sanders take issue with this characterization. While Sanders admits that "Jesus accused *some* Pharisees of hypocrisy and offended *some* by offering grace to sinners" he also points out that "in every religion, one may urge, there are legalistic, externalistic bigots."<sup>8</sup> Commenting on the prevalence of the belief that salvation by works is the essence of pharisaism, he writes,

The clergy needs Jesus to have opposed Pharisaic self-righteousness so that they can preach against that sin as manifested not historically in the Jews, but in their own parishioners. Here, I think, we have an explanation of why scholars, when faced by overwhelming evidence which shows Pharisaism and Judaism were not as such legalistic, fall back on the argument that some individuals must have been legalistic. They can then still maintain that the opposition between Jesus and his compatriots had to do with their (all too human) reliance on legalism and his devotion to grace. Jesus' message then becomes immediately relevant in today's churches.<sup>9</sup>

Gary Tyra believes that the essence of pharisaism is simply a need for certainty or a psychological need to live without spiritual ambiguity. He writes,

Surely there were historical Pharisees, even in Jesus' day, who wanted nothing more than to live their lives in a manner pleasing to God and to encourage their fellow countrymen to do the same. On the other hand, it is also easy to see how a fear-based pursuit of a psychological certainty concerning salvation could manifest itself in several religious developments (for example, the development of an authoritative oral tradition, a legalistic approach to salvation, a preoccupation

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tubingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), 75.

<sup>8</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 277.

<sup>9</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 279.

with religious rituals and external acts of piety, a separatist mindset, etc.) that together served to eliminate for the Pharisees any vestige of spiritual ambiguity. Could it be that at the heart of historic pharisaism there existed not simply a concern for integrity but also an inordinate need to be certain, to be in control, to be able to determine precisely who was pleasing to God and who was not? Could it be that at the heart of historic pharisaism there existed a fundamental inability to live with spiritual uncertainty and to exercise simple trust in the goodness and mercy of God?<sup>10</sup>

Coleman essentially agrees, focusing on the Pharisees “zeal to respect and follow the scriptures.”<sup>11</sup> He writes, “To blithely declare that (the Pharisees) were ‘hypocrites’ or ‘unloving’ or ‘fanatics,’ fails to see their complexity or depth . . . . The Pharisees had no greater task than to protect and propagate the laws of God.”<sup>12</sup> Coleman argues that this “zeal” for the law led to a series of excesses, beginning with their propensity to add to the law.<sup>13</sup> The additions or *seyags* (“fences”), which according to Coleman, characterized the oral law, were given to keep a person from breaking the written laws. He describes the rational for building fences, reasoning,

If we dance, who knows where that might lead? Back up two steps and build a fence. Some movies could corrupt—two more steps back and build another fence. Who knows where wine at mealtime might lead? More fence. Eventually we are no longer wrestling with the core problem of drunkenness and adultery. Rather we are fighting mock battles at the new fences we have erected. Now the new laws become the really important battlefields. Soon we test a person’s orthodoxy by his respect for the fences.<sup>14</sup>

In regards to Coleman, the great difficulty with making extra-biblical commandments the essence of pharisaism is that, as one examines the public ministry of historically important preachers, one finds that they often preached against behaviors not specified in scripture, building *seyags* for their parishioners. For instance, John Calvin

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<sup>10</sup>Gary Tyra, *Defeating Pharisaism: Recovering Jesus Disciplemaking Method* (Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic Books, 2009), 31.

<sup>11</sup>Coleman, *Pharisees Guide*, 7.

<sup>12</sup>Coleman, *Pharisees Guide*, 7.

<sup>13</sup>Coleman, *Pharisees Guide*, 7.

<sup>14</sup>Coleman, *Pharisees Guide*, 9.



aggressively attacked immorality and “preached many an angry sermon against the ‘brute beasts’ who inhabited Geneva and the pusillanimous magistrates who ruled over them: ‘a stubborn mule needs a stubborn muledriver’ was a proverb that he often repeated.”<sup>15</sup> At Calvin’s prompting, a measure was passed in 1544 that prohibited the singing of dirty songs.<sup>16</sup> Subsequent edicts would penalize “blasphemy, gambling, and drunkenness and prohibited the sale or purchase of cards, dice, and objects of popery” as well as “spelled out regulations to ensure modest of dress.”<sup>17</sup>

Two hundred years later, Jonathan Edwards spent a great deal of energy preaching against the practice of “bundling” where “parents allowed young people to spend the night in bed together partly clothed.”<sup>18</sup> While Edwards did not point to a text that specifically addressed this practice (as far as we know, such a practice did not exist in Judaic culture), he nevertheless believed that principles found in scripture gave him clear authority to oppose the practice. In a sermon preached to his congregation at Northampton entitled *Sin and Wickedness Bring Calamity and Misery on a People*, Edwards declared,

There are those practices that parents commonly allow that lead to uncleanness, that is so evident to the common light of mankind, that such things are looked upon as shameful and disgraceful at Canada, and at New York [and] England. I believe there is not a country in the Christian world, however debauched and vicious, where parents indulge their children in such liberties in company-keeping as they do in this country—that is, amongst those that pretend to keep the credit of their children.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 98.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict, *Purely Reformed*, 98.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict, *Purely Reformed*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 130.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 14: Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 502.

In another sermon entitled *Temptation and Deliverance: Joseph's Great Temptation and Gracious Deliverance*, Edwards addressed, not only bundling but late night dances among the youth. He said,

Many of you who have lately set up this practice of frolicking and jollity, profess to be children of the light and of the day; and not to be the children of darkness. Therefore walk as in the day; and do not those works of the darkness, that are commonly done at unseasonable hours of the night. . . . There may be . . . circumstances wherein dancing may not be unlawful. But all this makes nothing to the present purpose; to prove that this particular custom is not of a bad tendency. Besides, when the wise man says, "there is a time to dance," that does not prove, that the dead of the night is the time for it.<sup>20</sup>

During this same time, John Wesley fought his own battles against recreational sports which he simply called "diversions." Wigger explains,

Some of the "diversions" Methodists opposed seemed innocent enough, including playing cards, quoits, or the game of pitch and toss at the pub and smock races for women at parish feasts. But these were often mixed with more brutal sports—boxing, cudgeling (fighting with sticks in which the object was to "fetch blood" from the opponents head), dogfighting, cockfighting, and bull and badger baiting (in which the animal was tied to a short stake and attacked by dogs)—all accompanied by drinking and gambling on the outcome. At feasts and dances sexual proprieties were also relaxed, and ordinary people were tempted to spend more than they could afford on fashionable clothes. To make matters worse, much of this was done on the Sabbath. "All such diversions as these are the noblest instruments the devil has to fill you with earthly, sensual, devilish passions; to make you of a light and trifling spirit and, in a word, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," Wesley proclaimed in a sermon on "Public Diversions."<sup>21</sup>

Calvin, Edwards and Wesley each publicly opposed practices not specifically condemned in scripture because they believed the behaviors were self-evidently evil, led to temptation, or degraded societies. For each of these men, certain activities appeared to be innocent but led to sinful behaviors. Further, according to Wesley (one imagines that

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards, Vol. 4* (New York: Leavitt, Trow & Co., 1844), 599-600.

<sup>21</sup> John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury & the Methodists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35.

Calvin and Edwards would concur), such behaviors eroded a person's spirituality, slowly quenching their love of God. In their opinions, societies were made the worse to live in when these behaviors were tolerated, justifying their denunciations. In each of their cases, *seyags* were built that did not have specific biblical support and activities were opposed that are not specifically named as sins in scripture.

While Coleman may characterize such preaching as pharisaical because it builds *seyags*, it seems unwise to devise any definition of pharisaism which would include Calvin, Edwards, and Wesley. Each man was a primary initiator of a significant spiritual awakening in their respective spheres—Calvin a major player in the Protestant reformation, Edwards the catalyst behind the First Great Awakening in America, and Wesley leading spiritual renewal in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England. Further, if one were to compile a list of ministers over the last six centuries who have opposed practices unnamed in scripture on the grounds that such practices were self-evidently evil, led to immoral or unspiritual behavior, or degraded societies, the list would include most of the Protestant reformers and influential evangelists.<sup>22</sup>

To be certain, building *seyags* was done by most Pharisees. However, it is likely that Pharisees would have viewed their *seyags* as attempts to apply the Mosaic Law to contemporary settings. In regards to Second Temple Pharisees, Davies suggests that,

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<sup>22</sup> Billy Sunday, arguably the most successful evangelist in drawing crowds in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century frequently wove tirades against drinking, going to the theater, playing cards, and dancing into his sermons. Lyle W. Dorsett writes that Sunday "gradually began to give more emphasis in his campaigns to the goal of redeeming America's cities from a host of evils," prompting his hearers to lead righteous lives which included "regular church attendance, sexual purity, abstinence from drugs and alcohol except for medicinal purposes, honesty, hard work, avoidance of tobacco, dancing, and gambling, and more time for Bible study and prayer."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Billy Graham readily admits that "there are things in the Bible that are not actually named, but we know them to be wrong." Lyle W. Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 112; Billy Graham, *A Biblical Standard for Evangelists* (Minneapolis: Worldwide Publications, 1984), 78.

By thus accepting both the oral tradition as well as the written law, Pharisaism made possible the application of the Mosaic Law to ever-changing conditions. It made the Law the mint of prophetic truth. Strange as it may seem, the acceptance of tradition was the condition of adaptability. This was the aim of the Pharisees, and herein may be found the essence of Pharisaism. It was essentially an attempt by certain people within Israel to bring the whole of human life under the control of Law.”<sup>23</sup>

Loyalty to scripture necessitates an attempt to apply the intent of scripture to contemporary situations. In contemporary thought, this frequently includes dropping previously relative applications from the first century, such as women wearing veils during worship or exchanging the holy kiss,<sup>24</sup> and perhaps adding other relative applications such as instructing males and female teenagers not to share beds even if there is no sexual activity or attending late night dances.<sup>25</sup> As Gordon Fee points out, “cultures are in fact different, not only from the first to the twenty-first century, but in every conceivable way in the twenty-first century itself.”<sup>26</sup> Translating biblical commands and principles into new cultures is simply unavoidable. As Fee adamantly stresses, “all people ‘do’ hermeneutics, even if they know nothing about exegesis.”<sup>27</sup> Contemporary Christians and Second Temple Pharisees have equally grappled with the parameters of hermeneutics.

Nevertheless, it is true that Second Temple Pharisees did cross some boundary, for they do receive condemnation from Jesus on this point. While their intent was perhaps to adapt the Mosaic Law to the constantly changing conditions of life, Jesus accused them of having “seated themselves in the chair of Moses” (Matt 23:2). Clearly they had

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<sup>23</sup> W. D. Davies, *Introduction to Pharisaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 24-25.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1-16; Romans 16:16.

<sup>25</sup> An allusion to Jonathan Edward’s issues at Northampton referenced earlier.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 81.

<sup>27</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read*, 71.

transgressed a barrier, but in what way? Within the context of Matt 23:1-4, “seated themselves” seems to be the creation of the oral law that was declared to be given from the mouth of Moses. As James D. G. Dunn explains, a distinctive understanding that Pharisees held was that in addition to the written Law of Moses, there was also given by Moses an oral law illuminating the written law.<sup>28</sup> The condemnation was that the Pharisees attributed their “tradition of elders” to Moses, claiming his authority for their teachings. This seems to be far different than opposing practices on the rational basis that such behaviors are self-evidently evil, lead to temptation, or degrade societies.

Bryan Chapell’s comments regarding the failure to achieve mandate clarity seem applicable to the Pharisee’s transgression. He writes,

Preachers who cannot differentiate between the scriptural mandate and a good suggestion drain biblical power from their ministries. You must make sure that Scripture—not you—demands what your application requires. Preachers may suggest many things that help listeners fulfill God’s demands, but they err greatly when they imply (or believe) that their suggestions are the Bible’s requirements. A twenty-minute devotional everyday is a good suggestion, as are reading the Bible as a family at meals, engaging in a small-group Bible study, and enrolling in a Scripture memory course. The Bible, however, requires none of these specific practices. . . . Practical suggestions for meeting a biblical requirement are often needed in application, but these suggestions are proffered, not commanded.<sup>29</sup>

When suggestions are offered as biblical requirements, biblical truth is confused with religious conviction or as Fee might say, “relative application” becomes absolute application.<sup>30</sup> In other words, when communicators confuse their opinions, admonitions, warnings, or rebukes with the written word of God, they have “seated themselves in the chair of Moses.” Notice a few contemporary preachers who cross this line, confusing

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<sup>28</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 62-63.

<sup>29</sup> Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 232.

<sup>30</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read*, 83.

personal opinions about holiness with clear biblical doctrine.

In the *Gospel Trumpeter*, a holiness periodical published in Newark, Ohio, one minister takes his text from Revelation chapter 10 where John is instructed from heaven to “take up the little book.” The preacher interprets “the little book” to be the Bible. In this context he says,

The angel told John to take the Book and eat it, and that is what the Lord wants each of us to do. We are to eat all of its ingredients, all of its doctrines, all of its judgments, and all of its standards. That includes putting on modest apparel, even if it brings persecution. . . . The Bible standard is to wear modest apparel. The sisters letting their hair grow long is still in the Bible. Forgiving one another is still in the Bible. You should eat it up and let it become a part of you. While you put on some things, you must take off other things, such as adornment. You do not need earrings, nose rings, finger rings, or toe rings. Also, you need to get rid of your lipstick. Where should you put it? You should put it in the trash can, because you do not need it. God colored your lips for you when you were born, and that is all the color you need.<sup>31</sup>

Notice how the preacher tells his audience that they need to digest “all the ingredients” of the Bible. However, in listing the contents of the Bible, he includes personal convictions that include wearing jewelry and make-up which confuse the hearers regarding biblical truth and the preacher’s personal convictions.

Susan Mulch, a preacher with the Church of God Restoration Movement preached a sermon about Christian dress and included her view on mixed swimming:

Once in a rare while, the saints might go swimming, and it’ll be in a very private place, and it will be brothers with brothers and sisters with sisters. And when we go, do you know what our bathing suit looks like? It looks just like this—we are fully clothed, as at all other times. God has taught us modesty! The world says that’s crazy, but God says, “That’s modesty.”<sup>32</sup>

Notice again, according to Mulch, Christians swim fully clothed because “God says, ‘That’s modesty.’” Clearly, there is no passage cited that quotes God on record speaking

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<sup>31</sup> Roger Decker, “The Little Book,” *The Gospel Trumpeter* 33 (May, 2003): 6.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Mutch, “Dress . . . an Issue of the Heart” (sermon, Oklahoma City, OK, November, 2000).

these words nor is there any reasonable attempt at cultural translation to support these claims. However, Mulch chooses to represent her convictions as the word of God.

Emerson Wilson, an influential pastor among independent Church of God congregations preached a sermon during the 1970's that was put into pamphlet form. The subject addressed was whether men should have short or long hair. He says,

Long hair on men is open rebellion against God's eternal Word; it is sin, and it is of the devil! . . . The Bible says in Psalm 15:4 that a vile person ought to be condemned in your eyes. Long hair on men ought to make you so sick that you could not stand it. But you become adjusted to it. Your long-haired sons eat at your table, and you claim that you are living for God when the Bible says you are the master of that house and what comes in and out of that house is up to you."<sup>33</sup>

The sermon concludes with this pointed statement: "Let me say again that this is not a man's fancy or a man's idea. This is the standard of Heaven, and the standard of Heaven is the standard of the church. We must live that way here before we ever reach Heaven."<sup>34</sup> The blending of personal convictions and biblical truth are evident in these passages. The conviction that men ought to have short hair is not "man's idea" but the "standard of heaven."

In each of these sermons, the hearer is left confused (and possibly intentionally misled) about what the Bible teaches. The preachers do not make attempts at cultural translation; nor are they making their points by proposing that these behaviors are self-evidently evil, lead to temptation, or degrade societies. Rather they are communicating to their hearers that these activities are sins because they are violations of scripture. Therefore in each of these examples, the pharisaical line has been crossed and the preachers have "seated themselves in the chair of Moses," adding to the words of God.

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<sup>33</sup>Emerson A. Wilson, *Long Hair on Men/ Short Skirts on Women* (Newark, OH: God's Acres Press, 1973), 3.

<sup>34</sup>Wilson, *Long Hair*, 11.

Rather than discussing the essence of pharisaism by dwelling on pharisaic behaviors, it seems more productive to discuss pharisaism within the context of its originating motives. As Leland Ryken writes, “the Pharisees are foremost interested in the restoration of Israel.”<sup>35</sup> The ultimate goal of the Pharisees was national revival “by faithful adherence to the *tora* (cf. Tg Isa 4:3; 10:22) and by meticulous separation from the unclean ‘people of the land’ (*‘am-ha’ares*).”<sup>36</sup> This was the essence of Second Temple Pharisaism. The Pharisees did not begin as a movement whose ultimate goal was to “seat themselves in the chair of Moses.” Rather, pharisaism began with a reforming spirit. This seems to be a critical starting point when considering their 21<sup>st</sup> century counterparts.

As Eric Johnson writes, “obviously, as a historical group, the Pharisees will never be seen again. However, the spiritual dynamics that led to the Pharisees exist in all ages.”<sup>37</sup> As first century Pharisees could trace their origin to the badly needed reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah in the religious and cultural life of Israel, contemporary Christians can point to the perceived need for reformation as their origins. Virtually every major Protestant denomination began out of a desire to reform the existing church and positively influence the state. Tom Hovestol aptly summarizes the reforming trajectory of the Protestants well. He writes,

Looking at the roots of Pharisees historically, one can cite striking similarities to the Protestant Reformation with hints of the fundamental-evangelical movements of today. As the clergy and the religious culture of Judaism moved increasingly in a secular direction, a group of pious laymen (“pietists”) rose up to reclaim the identity of the Jews as people of God’s Word. They were determined to get “back to the Bible.” . . . They also protested (“Protestants”) the corruption of religion

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<sup>35</sup> Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 640.

<sup>36</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 4: Q-Z* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 134.

<sup>37</sup> Eric L. Johnson, “Where are the Pharisees Today?” *Reformation and Renewal* 7, no. 3 (Summer, 1998): 40. [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ref-rev/07-3/7-3\\_johnson.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ref-rev/07-3/7-3_johnson.pdf) (accessed on February 23, 2012).



and resisted the “humanism” of their day, Hellenism. In the ensuing “culture war,” they clung to the “faith once delivered to the saints” with tenacity. They sought to purify a religion gone ritualistic and meaningless and live holy lives (Holiness Movement). They piously practiced their faith and were sometimes persecuted for it. Conservatives of any faith today would be duly impressed with roots like these.<sup>38</sup>

The early Protestant reformers crusaded to reform the failures of Catholicism, hence the Protestant Reformation under reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. The movements that followed attempted to reform the Reformation. For instance, in Germany during the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Philipp Jakob Spener, the “Father of Pietism,” set out to reform the corruption he saw in his beloved Lutheran Church. He wrote that “although our Evangelical Lutheran Church is a true church and is pure in its teaching, it is in such a condition, unfortunately, that we behold its outward form with sorrowful eyes.”<sup>39</sup> Specifically, Spener was concerned with pastors who ambitiously pursued career advancement, drunkenness and lawsuits among church members, and worldliness in thought and deed.<sup>40</sup> Spener’s movement would be influential among different Protestant groups including those from the Evangelical and Wesleyan traditions.<sup>41</sup>

A century later, Wesley’s Methodists sought “to spiritually revitalize Anglicanism.”<sup>42</sup> John Wigger pinpoints the beginning of the Methodist Church in America to a sermon preached by Thomas Coke at a convention held in Baltimore on

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<sup>38</sup> Tom Hovestol, *Extreme Righteousness: Seeing Ourselves in the Pharisees* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 26-27.

<sup>39</sup> K. James Stein, *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 86.

<sup>40</sup> Stein, *Theologians*, 86.

<sup>41</sup> “Reformed Pietism, Radical Pietism, Moravianism, English Evangelicalism, Methodism, and the Great Awakening designate the varieties of historical manifestations.” Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, Rev. ed. (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1996), 15.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Bawer, *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997), 79.

December 27, 1784. He writes,

The colonial Anglican Church Coke claimed, had been “filled with the parasites and bottle companions of the rich and the great. . . . The drunkard, the fornicator, and the extortioner, triumphed over bleeding Zion, because they were faithful abettors of the ruling powers.” Coke argued that the Anglican clergy denied that believers could know for certain that their sins were forgiven by “the witness of the Spirit of God,” something Methodists believed “fundamental, yea, essentially necessary to constitute a child of God.” This sort of theological carelessness led to moral failure. . . . It was clear to the preachers gathered in Baltimore that they were establishing an episcopal polity completely independent from the Church of England, and, ultimately, from Wesley himself.”<sup>43</sup>

The meeting concluded with Coke and Francis Asbury being named the first two bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

A century after Wesley, “in the late nineteenth century, this process repeated itself when many Methodists who first sought to reinvigorate their church as part of the so-called Holiness movement eventually broke away to form such denominations as the Church of the Nazarene and the Salvation Army.”<sup>44</sup> In the years to come, the desire to reform the perceived failures within Protestant denominations led to a multiplicity of new sects between the Civil and First World War.<sup>45</sup>

Chief among these new groups were those with fundamentalist tendencies and churches which identified with the Holiness Movement.

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<sup>43</sup> Wigger, *American Saint*, 144.

<sup>44</sup> Bawer, *Stealing Jesus*, 79.

<sup>45</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 805-807. Sydney E. Ahlstrom categorizes these new groups who “were left unsatisfied with the mainstream Christian tradition” into five groups.

1. The agnostics, socialists, free religionists, and others who left the religious establishment.
2. The liberals and social gospellers who sought to adapt Christian faith and practice to modern needs.
3. Those who clustered together because of ethnic value or particular claims (i. e. special revelations). These groups include Mormons, Christian Scientists, Mennonites, and Unitarians.
4. Those later classified as Fundamentalists, “a vast interdenominational movement of those who protested against innovation in religion,” particularly against the innovations of the liberals and social gospellers.
5. The Holiness Movement which included some Pentecostal churches whose “chief concern was sanctification” and who protested “against birthright church membership and a Protestantism that had settled for a religion of conformity, middle-class respectability, and self-improvement.”

In describing the causal factors that gave birth to the holiness churches, the noted Church of God (Anderson, IN) historian, John W. V. Smith makes reference to Elmer T. Clark's assessment of the moral tone in America in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

At the close of the Civil War . . . there swept over the country a wave of immorality, secularism, and religious indifference. The spirit naturally affected the churches, bringing about what many believed to be a lowered moral tone, compromise with "the world," weakening of the insistence on definite religious experience as a condition of membership, with the consequent influx of unconverted persons into the fold, and a general decline of vital piety and holiness of life.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, "Fundamentalists, concerned with the consolidation and defense of staunch orthodoxy . . . were confronting liberals intent upon refashioning Christianity in the interests of vitality and relevancy."<sup>47</sup> The Fundamentalists saw themselves the "defenders of the faith"<sup>48</sup> and believed themselves to be saving the church from complete apostasy.

In each of the reformation movements that have been briefly cited, there was a desire to purify Christianity from secular thought and unholy behavior. Yet, the vision of the reformers was not limited to doctrinal purity and personal holiness in congregations. Like Second Temple Pharisees, their vision included lofty notions of the people of God and ultimately the state becoming "a city set upon a hill."<sup>49</sup>

For instance, upon arriving in Geneva in 1536, John Calvin not only wanted to evangelize Switzerland but made clear his intention to create a society that reflected godly values. He would seek in every possible way to transform Geneva into a model city of God. To accomplish this lofty goal, Calvin established a consistory to regulate

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<sup>46</sup> John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1980), 33.

<sup>47</sup> Allan H. Sager, *Preaching in American History*, eds. DeWitte Holland, Jess Yoder, and Hubert V. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 258.

<sup>48</sup> C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 14.

<sup>49</sup> A reference to Matthew 5:14.

Genevan life. A description of their activities are as follows:

In its first years of operation, the consistory busied itself prodding the tepid and the unconverted to attend the weekly sermon, to learn new prayers and catechism, and to give up Catholic devotional practices to which they remained attached. In 1542, the body heard the already impressive number of 320 cases, of which 161 involved such religious irregularities as missing sermons and failing to master the rudiments of the faith. Several Genevans were reprimanded for using magical charms or called in on suspicion of possessing rosary beads. Others were told to acquire a Bible or hire a teacher to instruct them in the faith. . . . A measure of 1544 issued in response to a complaint by Calvin prohibited the singing of dirty songs and forbade loitering in the streets during the Sunday sermon. A measure of 1546, abandoned after less than a month, required inhabitants who wished to drink or dine out to do so at one of five newly established “abbeys” overseen by members of the city government. No dancing or dicing were permitted; patrons were required to say a prayer before consuming what they ordered; and the Bible was made available to serve as the basis for edifying discussion.<sup>50</sup>

Likewise in Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli proposed a series of reforms intent on “putting Christian morality into practice.”<sup>51</sup> In a sermon entitled *Regarding Divine and Human Righteousness*, Zwingli explained that “he considered government to be an instrument of divine law responsible for bringing the behavior of the Christian community into as close conformity with that law as possible.”<sup>52</sup> A civic morals board was created to promote Christian behavior throughout the city which in turn passed ordinances intended to create a distinctively Christian community. Among these ordinances were those “limiting the number of guests at wedding feasts, forbidding people from going about masked, and barring all dancing that was considered indecent or took place either out-of-doors or at night.”<sup>53</sup>

In America there has been a strong thread of thought that the church and state should reflect the will of God. According to Brian Farmer, “the Puritans viewed the Bible

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<sup>50</sup> Benedict, *Purely Reformed*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> Benedict, *Purely Reformed*, 97-98.

<sup>52</sup> Benedict, *Purely Reformed*, 28.

<sup>53</sup> Benedict, *Purely Reformed*, 32.

as a complete guide to societal organization, and much like the present day conservative Muslims of Iran and Saudi Arabia, they believed that ‘God’s laws,’ as outlined in their Holy book, also should be civil laws.”<sup>54</sup> During the struggles of the American Revolution, even Thomas Paine in his influential pamphlet *Common Sense* came close to espousing this view. He writes,

But where says some is the King of America? I'll tell you friend, he reigns above, and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal Brute of Britain. Yet that we may not appear to be defective even in earthly honors, let a day be solemnly set apart for proclaiming the charter; let it be brought forth placed on the divine law, the word of God; let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know, that so far as we approve as monarchy, that in America the law is King.<sup>55</sup>

Notice that Paine says that a crown should be placed on the word of God and that the divine law should be “King.”

Further, similar to the Second Temple Pharisees, there has existed the widely held understanding that national survival depends upon obedience to God. This understanding blossomed during the American Revolution. Thomas Kidd summarizes the content of an article written by John Cleaveland, an influential Separatist evangelical leader from Ipswich, MA in the *Essex Gazette* on May 31, 1774, when war with Britain seemed imminent:

Cleaveland . . . feared that God was bringing judgment on Americans for their selfishness and immorality. If the colonists made themselves morally pure again, he believed, then God would hear their prayers for relief. Cleaveland combined spiritual and political tactics of opposition, calling on Americans both to repent of their sins and to resist the importation of British goods. If the colonists would seek God’s protection, reform their sinful ways, and sacrifice personal gratification for the public good, then God would preserve their civil and religious rights. Holiness and virtue would lead to victory against their enemies, but sin and selfishness would lead to more judgments. Cleaveland’s moral admonition to his fellow colonists was part of a long tradition of ascribing the public woes of

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<sup>54</sup> Brian R. Farmer, *American Conservatism: History, Theory, and Practice* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 106.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York: Fall River Press, 1995), 40.

Americans to their sinfulness, while summoning them to repentance that would lead to God establishing justice on their behalf. For a century or more, colonial New Englanders had responded to times of political or military crisis with Cleaveland's sort of exhortation: a jeremiad, or cautionary lecture. Recalling the message of Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, ministers told the people that sin had brought them their trouble but godliness could bring them deliverance.<sup>56</sup>

According to Richard Hughes, no one shaped this idea in Protestantism more than the early Bible translator, William Tyndale. By way of example, Hughes cites Tyndale's commentary of the Old Testament book of Jonah:

No text from Tyndale more clearly links his desire for religious reform with the motif of the national covenant than his preface to the book of Jonah, likely published in 1531. There Tyndale lamented that over the years, God had sent numerous prophets to proclaim repentance to England, but England had refused to respond to those indictments. Now England, like Israel of old, was in danger of suffering the wrath of God.<sup>57</sup>

As the Protestant Reformation swept onto the English Isle leading to the creation of the Church of England, albeit as a result of Henry the Eight's persistent desire for a divorce, "Tyndale's New Testament flourished and helped to shape the religious sentiments of his contemporaries. Indeed the text did its work so well that for generations to come, English Protestants embraced the twin themes of chosen people and national covenant. In time, they would bring that very same vision to America."<sup>58</sup> Hughes concludes that,

From the colonial period to the present, many American Christians have made the claim that God anointed America—first the colonies and then the nation—as his chosen people. Some have argued that God chose America as the formal successor to ancient Israel, or that in a very deliberate way, God chose the United States out of all the nations of the earth for a special mission in the world—to

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *God and Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 82.

<sup>57</sup> Richard T. Hughes, *Christian America and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 22.

<sup>58</sup> Hughes, *Christian America*, 23.

spread freedom and democracy, for example, or to bless the world with the truths of the Christian religion.”<sup>59</sup>

As Second Temple Pharisees advocated for communal and national purity, they began to see themselves as “‘holy ones’ and claimed to be the faithful ‘remnant.’”<sup>60</sup> John Oswalt explains that this “faithful remnant mentality” frequently arises in Christianity at times when the people of God sense significant trouble. He writes,

The concept of the remnant tends to go in and out of fashion, depending on the state of the church at a given time. When the church has been strong and moving forward, the emphasis has tended to be on the idea of participating on the coming kingdom of God. But when the church has felt persecuted and was in a state of little or no growth, the “remnant” theology has tended to be more popular.<sup>61</sup>

Robert Webber fears that a faithful remnant self-identity is a driving force among conservative Protestants. He believes there is a “conviction that the established church is an apostate instrument of Satan, a means by which even the elect will be lead astray. This emphasis has created (especially among fundamentalist and dispensationalist evangelicals) an anti-institutional bias and a schismatic remnant mentality.”<sup>62</sup> Morris A. Inch hints at this troubling self-identity within Evangelicalism when he writes, “several lines of thought suggest that evangelicals see themselves as the faithful remnant of orthodox Christianity set afloat in the sea of Enlightenment.”<sup>63</sup> Inch writes later,

This remnant theme helps us appreciate what might otherwise appear as unrelated characteristics of the evangelical movement. It ties together such predictable emphases as those on holiness and the second advent, to mention but two. The remnant mind-set enables the evangelical to take a vigorous stand in the face of opposition. He can remain resolute when others seem swept away by some shift in current. Not that he finds such an experience easy, but it is by the grace of God tolerable. . . . The evangelical movement includes theoretical considerations and

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<sup>59</sup> Hughes, *Christian America*, 18-19.

<sup>60</sup> Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, 134.

<sup>61</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 183.

<sup>62</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots: The Original Call to an Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 70.

<sup>63</sup> Morris A. Inch, *The Evangelical Challenge* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 101.

relevant actions, but it is also a state of mind or psyche. We cannot hope to understand the evangelical apart from the self-perception which permits him to function as he does.<sup>64</sup>

However, it is also true that evangelicals cannot be lumped together so quickly. J.

I. Packer points to a consistent movement away from the faithful remnant self-identity that seems to have been more dominant among evangelicals in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He writes,

The currency of the phrase (*the evangelical church*) marks the mutation of the former self-image of evangelicals as the marginalized faithful remnant within liberal-led Protestantism into a sense of being truly the core of God's church on earth. Evangelicalism is more and more viewing itself as the main stream, in relation to which non-evangelicals, whether so by adding to the biblical faith or subtracting from it, are deviating eddies, and evangelical vocation is more and more seen as involving prayer and labor for the leavening and reinvigorating of non-evangelical communities by evangelical truth.<sup>65</sup>

Christian Smith has also identified this encouraging trend in his research of beliefs and behaviors within evangelicalism. While conducting extensive interviews of self-identified evangelicals, he observed that "evangelicals do not spend a lot of time talking about that which is 'worldly,' mostly because such discourse has been characteristic of separatist fundamentalism."<sup>66</sup> This insight does not discredit Webber or Inch's insights, for the faithful remnant self-identity can still be found in contemporary Christian settings.

Moreover, it is possible for the faithful remnant self-identity to progress to a deeper stage- the earnest belief that collective judgment can be averted when a remnant is sanctified. This theological understanding makes the remnant the preservers of society

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<sup>64</sup> Inch, *Evangelical Challenge*, 111.

<sup>65</sup> J. I. Packer, "Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century," *Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher Hall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 120.

<sup>66</sup> Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 125.



through their righteous deeds. Grenz describes how that seemingly natural progression happened in Judaism. He says,

This sense of individual responsibility opened the way for the concept of the righteous remnant within the rebellious nation. Even though the nation turns away from God, the faithful Covenant-maker will preserve an obedient remnant of the people (Ezra 9:8; Isa 11:11; Jer 23:3; Zech 8:12). Early in Israelite history God had given to Solomon a promise that the action of the faithful few—the remnant—would benefit the wayward many: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chr 7:14).<sup>67</sup>

In the last fifty years, no preacher with a national following consistently weaved this progression of the faithful remnant self-identity into his preaching more effectively than the late Jack Hyles, former pastor of the First Baptist Church in Hammond, IN, which was often listed among the largest churches in America during his ministry.<sup>68</sup> Here is an excerpt from a sermon he preached in 1984:

Though voting is important, this country will not be spared the judgment of God at the ballot box. We need a Red Sea to part or some walls around Jericho to fall or the sun to stand still or a pillar of cloud to lead us or the fire to fall. If America is saved, she will be saved because of direct intervention from God Almighty in response to a sanctified people. The troubles in our nation are not caused mainly by the homosexuals, though it is a godless crowd. The troubles in America are not mainly caused by the liquor traffic, though it is a disgrace to our nation. The troubles in America are not caused basically by the dope traffic, though it is a horrible Satanic menace. Nations are spared when the remnant is sanctified. God looks for ten righteous people in Sodom. He looks for a covenant of salt. He looks for Gideon's three hundred who are set apart wholly to God. God will intervene and spare this nation when His people are sanctified; when Christian ladies turn off the soap operas; when Christian young people forsake their rock music; when Christian ladies learn to dress modestly; when a liberal is a liberal again and a fundamentalist is a fundamentalist again; when right is right, wrong is wrong, black is black and white is white again; when God's men are prophets again; when we again hear sermons on judgment, Hell, drinking, dancing and gambling; when fundamentalists sing like fundamentalists, talk like fundamentalists and dress like

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<sup>67</sup> Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 104.

<sup>68</sup> According to a 2011 study conducted by churchrelevance.com, First Baptist Church in Hammond was ranked as the 19<sup>th</sup> largest church in America with a weekly attendance of over 14,000. <http://churchrelevance.com/100-largest-churches-in-america-for-2009/> (accessed on April 24, 2012.)

fundamentalists again; and when we get back to our sawdust-trail, mourner's-bench Christianity which preaches holy living from the pulpit and practices it in the pulpit and the pew! Let us fight abortion. Let us fight the liquor traffic. Let us fight communism. Let us fight the dirty television shows. Let us fight indecent dress. Let us fight homosexuality. Yet, we must face the issue squarely-the salvation of any nation is caused by God's intervention in response to the sanctification of His people in that nation.<sup>69</sup>

For Hyles, the salvation of the church as well as the nation hinges on the righteousness of Christians. "We must face the issue squarely" he says, "the salvation of any nation is caused by God's intervention in response to the sanctification of His people in that nation." By "remnant," he appears to mean fundamentalists; by sanctified, he appears to mean adherence to a significant list of behaviors that he provides without making the case that they are self-evidently evil, lead to temptation, or degrade societies.

To recapitulate, pharisaism begins with a desire to save the people of God "from relapsing into decay."<sup>70</sup> They were "foremost interested in the restoration of Israel."<sup>71</sup> The Pharisees believed that individual and collective salvation would be attainable through purity, which would come through strict adherence to the written and oral law, which "was a kind of defensive barricade which surrounded Israel and protected it from the defilement of other nations."<sup>72</sup> The Pharisees viewed themselves as a "holy remnant,"<sup>73</sup> or at times, "the only true Israel,"<sup>74</sup> and took upon themselves the task of preserving "the sacred traditions within a people characterized by growing laxity and apostasy."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Jack Hyles, *Jack Hyles Speaks on Biblical Separation* (1984), <http://jackhyles.net/books/1984-jack-hyles-speaks-on-biblical-separation/> (accessed on February 23, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Herford, *The Pharisees*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Biblical Imagery*, 640.

<sup>72</sup> Dunn and Suggate, *Justice of God*, 21.

<sup>73</sup> Bromily, *Bible Encyclopedia*, 134.

<sup>74</sup> Bromily, *Bible Encyclopedia*, 44.

<sup>75</sup> Hansen, *People Called*, 342.

One possible example of contemporary pharisaism might be found in the early years of the Church of God (Anderson, IN).<sup>76</sup> F. G. Smith, their most influential theologian in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century describes their self-identity in relation to the wider church. In his exegesis of Revelation 17-18, he writes:

Protestants often limit “Babylon the Great” to the Church of Rome, because the woman symbolizing the apostate church (chap. 17) is denominated “Babylon the Great” (vs. 5). But the same verse also declares her to be the “mother of harlots,” and if she, a degraded woman, stands as the representative of a corrupt church her unchaste daughters must at least symbolize churches that are her descendants.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, Smith concludes, “the term ‘Babylon’ includes Protestantism.”<sup>78</sup> Moreover, “Babylon is fallen, the divine record states, and God is said to be calling his people out. To stay there, yoked up with multitudes of godless and graceless professors of religion, who are lovers of this world, means finally to lose spiritual life.”<sup>79</sup> The reason that Catholicism and Protestantism has “fallen” or apostatized is because the “people began to lose sight of the Word and Spirit of God as their governors.”<sup>80</sup> As one might expect, when describing the purpose of the Church of God Movement, Smith writes, “the purpose of such a movement is the restoration of a pure church, or temple of God, as in apostolic days—a church dedicated by the Holy Spirit and filled with the power and glory of God.”<sup>81</sup>

The similarities between F. G. Smith’s vision for the church and the Second Temple Pharisee’s vision for Israel are striking. As the Pharisees believed Israel was essentially backslidden, so Smith believed that Protestantism was “fallen.” As the

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<sup>76</sup> I am intimately aware of the Church of God (Anderson, IN) having attended their seminary and being ordained into their fellowship.

<sup>77</sup> F. G. Smith, *What the Bible Teaches*, ed. Kenneth E. Jones (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1945), 130.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *Bible Teaches*, 131.

<sup>79</sup> Smith, *Bible Teaches*, 134.

<sup>80</sup> Smith, *Bible Teaches*, 126.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, *Bible Teaches*, 135.

Pharisees called for separation “from the unclean ‘people of the land,’”<sup>82</sup> Smith calls all Christians to leave Babylon and be separate from the “godless and graceless professors of religion.” As the Pharisee believed the primary reason for the fall of Israel was the abandonment of the Law of Moses, so Smith believes the fall of Christianity is the result of abandoning the “Word and Spirit of God as their governors.”<sup>83</sup> As the Pharisees dreamed of a day when the nation of Israel would be restored to glory,<sup>84</sup> so Smith dreamed of the “restoration of a pure church.” Moreover for Smith, as “Babylon,” which includes Catholicism and Protestantism, is spiritually “fallen,” by deduction, the only faithful followers left must be the group that he represents.<sup>85</sup>

### ***The Pharisaic Pandora’s Box***

Once a sect’s meaning of origin, vision for the people of God, diagnosis of the people of God, means of restoring the people of God, and self-identity as it relates to the people of God becomes virtually identical to the Second Temple Pharisees, it seems plausible that the disturbing pharisaical behaviors that were visible in the New Testament will also become visible in that sect.

### **Pharisees glory in their piety.**

The first of these disturbing pharisaical behaviors is to perform deeds of personal piety to be visibly seen by others. Writers are quick to identify self-righteousness and pride as basic characteristics of Pharisees. While it is true that some Pharisees were overtly proud, it is also true that Pharisees condemned overt pride. In the Talmud, for

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<sup>82</sup> Bromily, *Bible Encyclopedia*, 134.

<sup>83</sup> Smith, *Bible Teaches*, 126.

<sup>84</sup> Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Biblical Imagery*, 640.

<sup>85</sup> It should be noted, that although the Church of God (Anderson, IN) traces its roots through Smith’s theology, it has largely abandoned Smith’s eschatology and his conclusions about Protestantism and their own role in the church-at-large. However, Smith’s teachings are still influential with a significant percentage of ordained ministers.

example, seven different types of Pharisees are categorized, the first being the “‘Shoulder’ Pharisee who wore his good deeds on his shoulder so everyone could see them.”<sup>86</sup> To be overtly proud was frowned upon in pharisaic circles. Yet, Jesus’ broad criticism of the Pharisees is clear: “*But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men*” (Matt 23:5).

One possible source of this pride may have resulted from the Pharisee’s immersion in the law. As Pharisees were devout students of the law, who studied and maintained the law with “scrupulous care,”<sup>87</sup> it seems reasonable that they were more likely to become proud in their knowledge and condescending towards those who did not possess their dedication. Charles Swindoll recalls growing up in a pharisaical congregation which emphasized doctrine. He writes,

A knowledge of doctrine became our watchword. Everyone outside of our circle was judged on the basis of how much they knew. And since they never seemed to know as much as we did, we looked down our noses at them! . . . As I look back and reflect on those days, I must confess I grew, not only in knowledge, but every bit as much in pride . . . a pride so hideous it was like a growing cancer in my life. What I gained in knowledge I lacked in compassion and care for others.<sup>88</sup>

However, Coleman explains how it is possible to do deeds of personal piety to be visibly seen by others for “faithful remnant” reasons. He writes,

The necessity to keep up appearances may have so permeated Christianity as to leave it extremely sterile out of fear of looking bad. Consequently many Christians make great efforts to attend religious functions lest people begin to wonder if they are “slipping.” Some carry their Bibles because they want to study them, while others tote them as a “testimony” to their piety. Others are convinced that the neat, close-cut hair style serves as evidence that they have not rebelled against God.

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<sup>86</sup> Hovestol, *Extreme Righteousness*, 82.

<sup>87</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 78.

<sup>88</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1986), 35-36.

A local church discusses the practicality of closing their Wednesday-night service in favor of a more fruitful approach. Would Christ have been dismayed to hear the members object because of what people would think? After all, the lights off in the building, and other people would think we are giving up the faith.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, it is possible that pious deeds are done to be seen by others as a means of letting the world know that a faithful remnant still exists in the community. The public acts of piety are committed to demonstrate that there is a remnant of believers who have remained separate, that have not been polluted by lukewarmness. Acts that appear to onlookers to be motivated by pride, from the doers perspective, are understood to be a testimony to unbelievers and an act of condemnation to other believers who have grown worldly.

#### **Pharisees are evangelistic for their own cause.**

An important pharisaical behavior that Jesus draws attention to is their evangelistic zeal for their own sect (Matt 23:15). Like Second Temple Pharisees, contemporary churches with pharisaic tendencies usually engage in evangelistic efforts to win converts to their particular understanding of Christianity. This evangelistic zeal often arises from the “conviction that the established church is an apostate instrument of Satan.”<sup>90</sup> After all if a group believes they are the “faithful remnant within liberal-led Protestantism,”<sup>91</sup> they see little use in aiding the “apostates” win new members.

Historians point out that the present form of Fundamentalism was birthed as a movement to convert theological liberals to conservative Christianity around the turn of the twentieth century. Allan H. Sager explains, saying “fundamentalists took the role of defenders of the faith, employing as channels for persuasion Bible and prophetic

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<sup>89</sup> Coleman, *Pharisees Guide*, 120.

<sup>90</sup> Webber, *Common Roots*, 70.

<sup>91</sup> Packer, *Ancient and Postmodern*, 120.

conferences, fundamentalist schools, special organizations, tractarian propaganda, personal correspondence, ecclesiastical and legislative pressures, and polemical preaching and platform speaking.”<sup>92</sup>

Grenz essentially agrees with Sager and traces this “defenders of the faith” identity through the followers of Carl F. H. Henry. He writes,

Henry illustrated the tendency among many neo-evangelicals to see the new evangelical movement as merely a replication in the modern context of the grand tradition of Protestant orthodoxy and to see themselves primarily as guardians of the tradition and apologists for the faith as they had received it. Convinced that evangelicals are the contemporary trustees of the “faith once delivered” they, following in Henry’s footsteps, willingly entered into dialogue with their context not so much to learn from it, as much as to point out the shortcomings of all other options and the superiority of their own supposedly orthodox convictions.<sup>93</sup>

Steve Bruce adds further historical perspective:

At first fundamentalism developed an organizational structure similar to the early days of the holiness movement. People remained in their denominations but read fundamentalist periodicals and books, held bible-study groups with like-minded believers, established educational institutions, and attended great summer rallies which were refined versions of the ‘camp-meetings’ of the second awakening. But as it became clear that fundamentalists were not going to be able to distract their denominations from the apostate direction in which they were headed, pressure built for succession. Most denominations experienced schism and by the 1920s, fundamentalists were more likely to be in fundamentalist denominations than to form awkward pressure groups in mainstream churches.<sup>94</sup>

While Fundamentalists went to great efforts to reach out to non-Christians, it was often for the purpose of winning them to Fundamentalism rather than to Christ. James Barr, in his significant study of Fundamentalism, identifies three major characteristics of Fundamentalism of which the third is “an assurance that those who do not share their religious viewpoint are not really ‘true Christians’ at all.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Sager, *Preaching*, 264-265.

<sup>93</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 109-110.

<sup>94</sup> Steve Bruce, *PRAYTV: Televangelism in America* (London: Routledge, 1990), 16.

<sup>95</sup> James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 1.

During the 1950s and 60s in America, the Fundamentalists evangelistic zeal was sometimes focused towards the perceived threats within the culture and church. One of the most successful Fundamentalist evangelists of the 1960s was Billy James Hargis with the Christian Crusade. In a 1964 interview, Hargis identified his organization's goals as twofold: to expose the un-American and un-Christian activities of the religious and political liberals.<sup>96</sup>

One sees this misguided zeal clearly in the attacks of Fundamentalists when they perceived Billy Graham was becoming increasingly ecumenical in his philosophy of ministry. While Graham is the recipient of widespread admiration, his "most vitriolic critics are not found among secularists or liberal churchmen but within the ranks of certain segments of the evangelical fundamentalist camp."<sup>97</sup> In a 1957 pamphlet entitled "Should Fundamentalists Support the Billy Graham Crusade?" Earnest Pickering, then the National Executive Secretary for the Independent Fundamental Churches of America, gave several reasons why fundamentalists should shun the famed evangelist. The first reason given was "he has refused to allow his campaigns to be sponsored solely by fundamentalists."<sup>98</sup> Pickering then cited Graham's preaching during his England Crusade as evidence. He writes,

The gradual change in Graham's philosophy also become apparent in his meetings in England. Liberal churchmen appeared on the platform and participated in the Crusade. Converts were advised to return to some Church of England churches that were liberal. Leaders of evangelical churches in England who had maintained a line of demarcation between fundamentalism and liberalism found to their chagrin that a fellow-fundamentalist—Billy Graham—

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<sup>96</sup> Billy James Hargis, *The Real Extremists: The Far Left* (Tulsa, OK: Christian Crusade Publications, 1964): 7. Quoted in Dale Leathers, *Preaching in American History*, eds. DeWitte Holland, Jess Yoder, and Hubert V. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 314.

<sup>97</sup> Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober, *A Day in the life of Billy Graham* (Garden City, NY: Square One Publishers, 2003), 43-44.

<sup>98</sup> Ernest Pickering, *Should Fundamentalists Support the Billy Graham Crusades?* (1957), <http://20.sharperiron.org/printthread.php?t=1081> (accessed on March 27, 2012).



had undercut their position and seriously hindered the work which they had tried to build.<sup>99</sup>

Notice that Pickering's grievance is that Graham had "undercut" the fundamentalist endeavor and "seriously hindered" their work by advising Christian converts to return to the Church of England. Years later when Graham held a crusade in Greenville, SC, the home of Bob Jones University, his campaign faced boycotts from the university's faculty and staff. According to James Morris,

Dr. Bob Jones Jr., the President of the school, had attacked Graham as a false teacher who "is doing more harm to the cause of Jesus Christ than any living man." Jones was upset because Graham's crusade was sending people who had made decisions for Christ back to their own churches instead of directing them to fundamentalist churches. In Jones' words, Graham was sending them "back to unbelieving churches, to false teachers and Unitarians."<sup>100</sup>

While there is certainly substance to Pickering and Jones' charges—Graham may very well have failed to do enough to keep converts from attending congregations that denied the deity of Christ and the inspiration of scripture—it seems an overstatement by Jones to suggest that Graham was 'doing more harm to the cause of Jesus Christ than any living man.'

**Pharisees obstruct the way to God by trivializing important aspects of God's Law while emphasizing less important aspects of God's law.**

As stated in chapter two, one of the fundamental problems with creating your own laws is that you inevitably deemphasize laws that should be paramount and emphasize other laws that are unimportant. But why undertake such a task? If Fischer is correct, the primary motive behind creating rules is essentially control. He writes,

It's the Pharisee in us that wants control, and more than anything we want control over the rules of the game. . . . This system cleverly enables us to follow the law

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<sup>99</sup>Pickering, *Billy Graham Crusades*.

<sup>100</sup>James Morris, *The Preachers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 383.

perfectly (as we have interpreted it) while passing judgment on all those who don't follow it, can't follow it, or who simply couldn't care less about our little charade.<sup>101</sup>

However, it is unlikely that a Pharisee would own to such a motive. The likelihood seems greater that a Pharisee would own the Puritan's rational for extra-biblical law-making,<sup>102</sup> which is hinted at in Grenz's assessment:

The goal of the gospel, the Puritans concluded, is to gather out of the world 'pure' churches, that is, congregations that contain only, or consist solely of, the elect of God. . . . Their commitment to the pure church idea motivated the Puritans' strident critique of the Church of England. In their estimation, rather than striving to be a church of the regenerate, the English church was content to remain a 'mixed assembly' that refused to distinguish between the saints of God and the unregenerate.<sup>103</sup>

The Puritan's desire to have a congregation "consisting solely of, the elect of God" could have driven their drive towards externalism. After all, if one seeks to know for sure who the elect is, one must rely on visible, measurable signs of conversion. This naturally leads to externalism for as Carl F. H. Henry remarks, "smoking can be a subject of legislation; pride cannot."<sup>104</sup>

If measurable signs are of great significance, it becomes possible that sins such as envy, coveting, and lust become less significant than alcohol consumption or dancing. It is reminiscent of the old yarn told in many conservative traditions about the preacher who

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<sup>101</sup> Fischer, *12 Steps*, 19.

<sup>102</sup> David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 10. David Hall briefly describes laws and practices that emerged out of Puritanism that were practiced in early New England. He writes, "Psalm-singing replaced ballads. Ritual was reorganized around the celebration of the Sabbath and of fast days. No town in New England had a maypole; no group celebrated Christmas or St. Valentine's Day, or staged a pre-Lenten carnival! New England almanacs used numbers for each month instead of names deemed 'pagan.' And in naming children, parents largely restricted themselves to names that appeared in the Bible. . . . In doing so they acted to distinguish 'profane' names from those considered holy."

<sup>103</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 42-44.

<sup>104</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 421.

preached against sex on the grounds that it might lead to dancing.<sup>105</sup> In Hovestol's opinion the desire for "measurable signs" drove externalism in the Pharisees. He writes, "the Pharisees had reversed God's values, giving more weight to lesser priorities. Thus, they valued measurable behaviors (like tithing) over a lifestyle of love and justice."<sup>106</sup> The reason, he adds, is because they valued "recognition by man over the 'Well done' of God."<sup>107</sup>

While Hovestol may be right—praise from their contemporaries may have been part of the Pharisee's motive—Burton Mack surfaces a deeper reason. He comments that the minutiae of the Pharisees after the destruction of Herod's Temple "were signs of piety for a progressive sect engaged in redefining what is meant to be Jewish. . . . They were . . . extremely important rules for the recognition of any Jew who wanted to be 'pure,' that is to be recognized in the Jewish community as loyal to Jewish traditions."<sup>108</sup> In other words, visibly demonstrations of piety were signs of loyalty to pharisaism, particularly the cause of religious and national revival which dominated their motives. Thus, at the origin of their law-making was the faithful remnant self-identity, which placed importance on demonstrating to the community that there was a remnant of believers who were separate, not having been polluted by "the unclean 'people of the land.'"<sup>109</sup>

It should be noted that, regardless of the motivations, a great deal of spiritual and emotional damage occurs when persons or groups add-to are misapply the laws of God. Charles Swindoll tells of a missionary family that returned to the States and planned to

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<sup>105</sup> Steve Schaefer, *Living in the Overlap: How Jesus' Kingdom Proclamation Can Transform Your World* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing), 122.

<sup>106</sup> Tom Hovestol, *Spiritual Profiling: How Jesus Interacted with 8 Different Types of People and Why it Matters for You* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 191.

<sup>107</sup> Hovestol, *Spiritual Profiling*, 191.

<sup>108</sup> Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?: The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 58.

<sup>109</sup> Bromily, *Bible Encyclopedia*, 134.

leave full-time ministry because of the stifling pettiness of the fellow missionaries in their place of service. In relaying the story, Swindoll confessed that he could hardly believe what he heard:

The particular place they were sent to serve the Lord did not have access to peanut butter. This particular family happened to enjoy peanut butter a great deal. Rather creatively, they made arrangements with some of their friends in the States to send them peanut butter every now and then so they could enjoy it with their meals. The problem, is they didn't know until they started receiving the supply of peanut butter that the other missionaries considered it a mark of spirituality that you *not* have peanut butter with your meals. . . . The young family did not buy into that line of thinking. Their family kept getting regular shipments of peanut butter. They didn't flaunt it, they just enjoyed it in the privacy of their own home. Pressure began to intensify. . . . The legalism was so petty, the pressure got so intense and the exclusive treatment became so unfair, it finished them off spiritually. They finally had enough. Unable to continue against the mounting pressure, they packed it in and were soon homeward bound, disillusioned and probably a bit cynical.<sup>110</sup>

As absurd as Swindoll's account may appear, those who are familiar with churches with pharisaic tendencies will find such twisted emphases believable. Philip Yancey testifies of the terrible extremes that can take place when a sect of believers attempt to determine which laws of are more importance than others. He writes,

One church that I attended during formative years in Georgia of the 1960s presented a hermetically sealed view of the world. A sign out front proudly proclaimed our identity with words radiating from a many-pointed star: "New Testament, Blood-bought, Born-again, Premillennial, Dispensational, fundamentalist . . . " Our little group of two hundred people had a corner on the truth, God's truth, and everyone who disagreed with us was surely teetering on the edge of hell. . . . Later, I came to realize that the church had mixed lies with truth. For example, the pastor preached blatant racism from the pulpit. Dark races are cursed by God, he said, citing an obscure passage in Genesis. They function well as servant—"Just look at how colored waiters in restaurant can weave among the tables, swiveling their hips, carrying trays"—but never as leaders.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 93-94.

<sup>111</sup> Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor: How My Christian Faith Survived the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 1-2.

Later Yancey writes,

I have met many people, and heard from many more, who have gone through a similar process of mining truth from their religious past: Roman Catholics who flinch whenever they see a nun or priest, former Seventh Day Adventists who cannot drink a cup of coffee without a stab of guilt, Mennonites who worry whether wedding rings give evidence of worldliness. Some of them now reject the church entirely, and find Christians threatening and perhaps even repellant.<sup>112</sup>

**Pharisees believe their cause to be so important that they are tempted to take advantage of individuals for gain,<sup>113</sup> even to the point of persecuting those sent by God.**

Pharisaism lends itself strongly to an “end justifies the means” approach. Francis Upham writes that a righteous man “never allows evil means for the overcoming of evil. . . . He is to wait until the means are as holy as the end.”<sup>114</sup> However, commenting on the Pharisee’s decision to attempt to murder Jesus, he writes,

And yet the Pharisees accepted the counsel of Caiaphas, a Sadducee, that one man should die for the people. With them the end justified the means. The Pharisees were persuaded that if it were the will of God—and they doubted not, they knew it—that a thing should be done, any means of doing it must please him. The whisperings of their hearts of any way to their own selfish desires seemed heavenly voices. Whatever they did for passion’s sake, for pleasure, or for profit, they did for God.”<sup>115</sup>

An “end justifies the means” approach was also characteristic of Paul when he lived as a Pharisee. Before his Damascus Road conversion, Paul had taken, “upon himself to be the defender of his faith. . . . Armed with arrest warrants, Saul would descend on an unsuspecting community of believers, expose them, and arrange for their public

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<sup>112</sup> Yancey, *Soul Survivor*, 5-6.

<sup>113</sup> Interestingly, Steve Bruce comments on the financial scandals that engulfed Jerry Falwell’s ministry in the early 1980’s but earnestly believes that Falwell made dire appeals for capital because “he was motivated to do so by the fear that America was incurring God’s wrath and was on the point of being irrevocably damned.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, Falwell believed his cause was so important that he was willing to push the limits of fiscal honesty. Bruce, *PRAYTV*, 141.

<sup>114</sup> Francis William Upham, *Saint Matthew’s Witness to Words and Works of the Lord* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1891), 181.

<sup>115</sup> Upham, *Saint Matthew’s Witness*, 181.

accusation and arrest.”<sup>116</sup> Timothy Keller points out that “Pharisaic people assume they are right with God because of their moral behavior and right doctrine. This leads naturally to feelings of superiority toward those who do not share their religiosity, and from there to various forms of abuse, exclusion, and oppression.”<sup>117</sup>

The classic example of superiority erupting in violent behavior began in 1095, when the Catholic Church motivated much of Europe to crusade to reclaim the Middle East. At Clermont, Pope Urban II delivered a sermon that is widely believed among historians to be the catalyst that led to the First Crusade to capture Jerusalem. According to Malcolm Billings, “the Pope at Clermont appealed to the people’s deep reverence for the holy places; the idea that Christians have lost their rightful inheritance, and that they did not have control of these shrines, struck a strong cord.”<sup>118</sup> The appeal to recapture the holy shrines, including Mary’s burial place and the Temple Mount motivated masses of Europeans to fight and kill those who possessed the land they believed rightfully belonged to the church.

Yet, Thomas Asbridge presents a still puzzling question for many: “how did a seemingly pacifistic religion like Christianity militarize so readily?”<sup>119</sup> His answer is insightful and speaks to the broader question of why people with pharisaic tendencies, while devoutly religious, can quickly become vicious in their attacks. He says,

Pope Urban II did not conjure the idea of a crusade from thin air, nor did he consider the concept of holy war to be a revolutionary or even novel idea. In his mind, centuries of Christian, and even pre-Christian, tradition legitimized the principles espoused at Clermont. It was inevitable that his ideas would be

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<sup>116</sup> John M. Buchanan, *A New Church for the New World* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2008), 23.

<sup>117</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 58.

<sup>118</sup> Malcolm Billings, *The Cross & the Crescent: A History of the Crusades* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1990), 20.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22.

influenced by precedent because eleventh-century Latin society was profoundly retrospective. Being Christian to the core, it accepted two immutable truths: scripture the cornerstone of the faith, was utterly unassailable, the unquestionable word of God; and at the moment of its foundation by St. Peter, the Roman Church had been a precise expression of divine will, the Lord's design for mankind made manifest on earth. These two ancient rocks of perfection left a heavy imprint upon the medieval mind. Fixated by this vision of a golden age in which the apostles supposedly created an ideal Christian order, and governed by an immovable, authoritative text, the medieval world was obsessed with the past.<sup>120</sup>

In other words, according to Asbridge, the crusaders, armed with the belief that Roman Catholicism was "the Lord's design for mankind made manifest upon the earth" and deeply nostalgic about the past (or at least, the way things should be—that the church ought to be in control of the land in when Jesus lived), invaded the Holy Land to initiate war. It was essentially a desire to make things as they should be—revivalism—that prompted the First Crusade. Believing the "end" was God's will, the "means" became "abusive, exclusive, and oppressive."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 22.

<sup>121</sup> Keller, *Reason for God*, 58.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DESIGN

*Every pastor will encounter Pharisaism. A pastor armed with theology, Greek and Hebrew exegesis, expositional skills, and pastoral theology classes yet unaware of the pervasiveness of Pharisaism courts disaster. Conversely, understanding Pharisees will equip a pastor to encounter the subtle twists and, at times, unsuspected cruelty of people within the church. It will even help the minister to face the forces that lurk in his own soul—the scourge of self-righteousness and its cousin, contempt for others. A pastor naive to the presence, power, and practices of the Pharisees is prone to get 'blown away' by what he finds in the church—and sometimes his own soul."*

--Tom Hovestol, *Extreme Righteousness: Seeing Ourselves in the Pharisees*

#### **Chapter Overview**

Chapter 4 is written as a seminar to inform and prepare preachers, teachers, and church leaders who are in positions that involve communicating the gospel and discipling members. Those who are involved in this seminar must have a desire to speak effectively and lovingly to the unique self-identity identity and concerns of pharisaical individuals.

#### **Seminar Syllabus**

##### **Seminar Title**

Effectively Communicating to Contemporary Christians with Pharisaic Tendencies

##### **Seminar Purpose**

In each congregation are members who display pharisaic tendencies. These individuals are often well-meaning worshipers who have pharisaic tendencies that have been passed down in their worshiping heritage or have resulted from their misguided reading of scripture. For the minister, these pharisaic tendencies need to be addressed out of regard for the member and congregation. However, communicators frequently find that addressing pharisaic behaviors is akin to sticking one's hand in a beehive. It usually seems to be unproductive and often stirs up animosity and strife against the messenger. The church is populated with communicators who have attempted to produce change in pharisaic congregations, only to find themselves victims of harsh accusations and hostile actions. The question is "how does a communicator speak to pharisaic tendencies in a manner that produces change in the life of the listener?" This seminar will attempt to answer this question and prepare the participant as he/she ministers to contemporary Pharisees.



### **Seminar Outcome**

Participants will be able to recognize pharisaic behaviors, understand the pharisaic self-identity that informs pharisaic behaviors, and learn to speak directly to the pharisaic self-identity. This will enable the participants to minister to people with pharisaic tendencies with new understanding, avoiding pitfalls that produce unnecessary hostility and conflict. Further, as the communicator begins to understand the heart and mind of the Pharisee, he/she may be able to minister to their own deeper spiritual needs.

### **Seminar Objectives**

1. Participants will know what is meant by the term “pharisaic behaviors.”
2. Participants will understand the pharisaic “soil” and “self-identity” that result in pharisaic behaviors.
3. Participants will learn how to speak directly to the pharisaic self-identity.

### **Seminar Schedule**

This course is designed to last approximately 3 hours and is composed of three sessions created to last approximately one hour each. The sessions are arranged to be taught consecutively on a single day or on a weekly basis if desired.

### **Seminar Sessions**

1. Defining Pharisaic Behavior in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
2. How Pharisaic Behaviors Result from the Pharisaic Self-Identity
3. How Jesus Spoke to Pharisees
4. Opportunities and Pitfalls when Speaking to Pharisees

### **Facilitator Preparation**

In order to teach this course successfully, the instructor will need to be very familiar with chapters 2 and 3 of this project as well as the supplemental reading. Further, the instructor will need adequate time to reflect on their interaction with persons with pharisaical tendencies. Ideally, the instructor will have preaching/teaching experience in church settings with significant constituencies of pharisaical persons.

### **Supplemental Reading**

Hovestol, Tom. *Extreme Righteousness: Seeing Ourselves in the Pharisees*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997.

Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, 264-278.

### **A Cautionary Word:**

This seminar should not be primarily a time to criticize people with pharisaical tendencies. It is not a time to be pharisaical about Pharisees. Rather, it is a time to

examine how Pharisees reach logical conclusions based upon their course of reasoning. The goal of this seminar is redemptive.

### ***Session 1--Defining Pharisaic Behavior in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

#### **Seminar Outcome**

Participants will be able to recognize pharisaic behaviors, understand the pharisaic self-identity that informs pharisaic behaviors, and learn to speak directly to the pharisaic self-identity.

#### **Session Objective**

Participants will know what is meant by the term “pharisaic behaviors.”

#### **Session Goals**

1. Participants will get to know each other as well as the instructor.
2. Participants will be able to identify contemporary definitions of *Pharisee*.
3. Participants will be able to give 5 or 6 characteristics of New Testament Pharisees.
4. Participants will be able to compare and contrast New Testament Pharisees with their contemporary counterparts.

#### **Instructor Preparation**

The instructor should read the section entitled *The Characteristics of Second Temple Pharisees* in chapter 2 of this project.

### **Session 1--Expanded Teaching Outline**

#### **Introduction**

The seminar leader will invite each participant to introduce themselves to the class, sharing their name and ministry venue. (If this seminar is held primarily for the leadership within a single congregation, this may be omitted.)

#### **Seminar Introduction**

The seminar leader will introduce the overall seminar by sharing the purpose, outcome, and objectives. The leader will also brief the class on the schedule and share “a cautionary word” provided in the syllabus. It will be helpful to have Tom Hovestol’s quote found at the beginning of this chapter displayed on power point during this time.

#### **Session Introduction**

The seminar leader will introduce the session by explaining the tendency we have to label and mislabel individuals. This has been true with the term *Pharisee*. (An illustration such as the newspaper article concerning William Dannemeyer found in the introduction of this project should be shared.)

## Lesson

GOAL 1: Participants will be able to identify contemporary definitions of *Pharisee*.

*Activity-* The attendees will discuss their experiences with pharisaical people. This objective will be achieved by engaging attendees in a discussion about their experiences with people they would define as *pharisaical*.

This activity will be achieved in the following way:

- a. Prior to a group discussion on experiences with pharisaical people, the participants will be given 2-3 minutes to write words or phrases they associate with the *Pharisee* label.
- b. The leader will open with a discussion on "What is the first word or phrase that you think of when you hear the term *Pharisee*?"
- c. The leader will continue the group discussion, listing common traits of Pharisees on the board. The leader will put a check beside traits mentioned by more than one group and ask for consensus that this is a dominant trait of pharisaical people.

GOAL 2: Participants will be able to give 5 or 6 characteristics of New Testament Pharisees.

*Activity-* The class will interact with each other using Matthew 23 to uncover the behaviors that Jesus identified among the 1<sup>st</sup> century Pharisees.

This activity will be achieved in the following way:

- a. The leader will group the participants (2-4 in a group) and assign portions of Matthew 23 to each group.
- b. On chart paper, each group will list characteristics of Pharisees that they uncover in their assigned section. When each group is finished, the lists will be compiled and posted at the front of the class.
- c. Each group will then explain to the class the exegesis behind their list.

The leader should make sure that the discussion includes the following pharisaical behaviors or their equivalent. (This is important to establish for Sessions 2 and 3.)

These behaviors are:

1. Exceeding biblical authority by making binding rules. (verses. 1-4)
2. Glorifying in personal piety. (verses 5-12)
3. Obstructing the way to God by clouding salvation by grace through faith. (verse 13)
4. Using their reputations for gain. (verse 14)
5. Evangelizing converts to their own sect. (verse 15)
6. Trivializing important aspects of God's law. (verses 16-22)

7. Emphasizing less important aspects of God's law. (verses 23-24)
8. Valuing outward signs of holiness over inner purity. (verses 25-28)
9. Persecuting those sent by God. (verses 29-36)

GOAL 3: Participants will be able to compare and contrast New Testament Pharisees with their contemporary counterparts.

*Activity-* After listing these behaviors, the class will discuss how these behaviors appear in 21<sup>st</sup> century congregations.

This activity will be achieved in the following way:

- a. Using the list created from objective 2, the leader will allow for open discussion about how these behaviors/traits appear in 21<sup>st</sup> century congregation. To aid in the discussion, the leader may take each characteristic (1-9) and ask if any participant has personally encountered this behavior in a religious setting.

### ***Session 2--How Pharisaic Behaviors Result from the Pharisaic Self-Identity***

#### **Seminar Outcome**

Participants will be able to recognize pharisaic behaviors, understand the pharisaic self-identity that informs pharisaic behaviors, and learn to speak directly to the pharisaic self-identity.

#### **Session Objective**

The participants will understand the pharisaic "soil" and "self-identity" that result in pharisaic behaviors.

#### **Session Goals**

1. Participants will be able to explain *pharisaic soil*.
2. Participants will be able to explain the *righteous remnant self-identity*.
3. Participants will be able to trace pharisaic behaviors to the *remnant self-identity*.

#### **Instructor Preparation**

The leader should be very familiar with the section entitled *Pharisaic Judaism: It's Beginning and Self-Identity* in chapter 2 as well as chapter 3. The instructor should also review the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

#### **Participant Preparation**

For the sake of saturation, it is recommended that the participants be given the following reading assignments after session one to prepare for session two:

William Coleman, *The Pharisees' Guide to Total Holiness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1977), 6-16.

Tom Hovestol, *Extreme Righteousness* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 23-34.

## Session 2--Expanded Teaching Outline

### Session Introduction

If the seminar leader decides to teach these sessions on a weekly basis rather than consecutively, a five minute review will be in order. To review, begin with the question displayed on power point-- "*What are the biblical characteristics of a Pharisee?*" Then, using power point, display the nine characteristics from Matthew 23 (from session 1, goal 2) one at a time with a few comments. This review should take 3-5 minutes.

### Lesson

GOAL 1: Participants will be able to define *pharisaic soil*.

*Activity-* The leader will lecture on the origin of the Pharisees using the section entitled *Pharisaic Judaism: High Ideals for the People of God* in chapter 2 as a basis.

The instructor should begin by raising the question "*What would prompt any person to want to become a Pharisee?*"

To adequately answer this question, the following points should be made during the lecture.

- a. Pharisaic Judaism emerged as a response to the national decay of Israel.
- b. Pharisees believed that Israel's deplorable condition was the result of:
  - (1) Israel abandoning the written and oral Law of Moses as the governing law in all aspects of life AND
  - (2) Gentile influence in the life of Israel.
- c. The Pharisee's ultimate vision for Israel was of a holy kingdom of priests.

Here are a few quotes that might be used as power points. While time constraints will not allow all of these power points to be used, one or two may be helpful.

"If Moses were the real founder of the Jewish religion, giving to it the power to rise above and draw away from religions of 'the peoples round about,' Ezra stood forth at a most critical period to save the Jewish religion, and with it the national life, from relapsing into decay through contact with Gentile ideas and practices . . . The starting point of any history of Pharisaism must of necessity be the work of Ezra." (R. Travers Herford, *The Pharisees*, 18.)

“The timing of the arrival of Pharisaic Judaism in Jewish history cannot be understated. It was a time in Jewish history when the glories of the united kingdom of David and Solomon had long since faded but not the memories. The nation had turned from God and with the turning, had forfeited their bright destiny. In response to Israel’s apostate and downtrodden condition, the Pharisees took upon themselves the mantle of Ezra and began to work diligently for national revival.” (*Chapter 2*)

“[There] was the sense that the law was a kind of defensive barricade which surrounded Israel and protected it from the defilement of other nations. God had separated Israel from the other nations, and the law preserved that separateness. This was why, for example, circumcision was so important to the Jews. . . . This is why the distinction between clean and unclean foods was so important; it reinforced the difference between Israel and the nations (see e. g. Leviticus 20:24-26). Again, this was why Gentiles were forbidden to enter the Temple sanctuary in Jerusalem; Mount Zion was the focal point of God’s dwelling on earth, and so the most holy of all places. In short a fundamental conviction for Jews of Paul’s time was that God had chosen Israel to be his own, and had given Israel the law to mark Israel off from other nations.” (James D. G. Dunn and Alan M. Suggate, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 20-22.)

“Looking at the roots of Pharisees historically, one can cite striking similarities to the Protestant Reformation with hints of the fundamental-evangelical movements of today. As the clergy and the religious culture of Judaism moved increasingly in a secular direction, a group of pious laymen (“pietists”) rose up to reclaim the identity of the Jews as people of God’s Word. They were determined to get “back to the Bible.” . . . They also protested (“Protestants”) the corruption of religion and resisted the “humanism” of their day, Hellenism. In the ensuing “culture war,” they clung to the “faith once delivered to the saints” with tenacity. They sought to purify a religion gone ritualistic and meaningless and live holy lives (Holiness Movement).” (Tom Hovestol, *Extreme Righteousness: Seeing Ourselves in the Pharisees*, 26-27)

“The Pharisees before the destruction were those Jews who believed that one must keep the purity laws outside of the Temple. Other Jews, following the plain sense of Leviticus, supposed that purity laws were to be kept only in the Temple, where priests had to enter a state of ritual purity in order to carry out the requirements of the cult, such as animal sacrifice. . . . The

Pharisees thus arrogated to themselves—and to all Jews equally—the status of Temple priests and did the things which priests must do on account of their status. The table of every Jew in his home was seen to be like the table of the Lord in the Jerusalem Temple. The commandment ‘You shall be a kingdom of priests and holy people,’ was taken literally.” (Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book*, 20-21.)

GOAL 2: Participants will be able to explain the *righteous remnant self-identity*.

*Activity-* Participants will be lead in a discussion by the leader with the intended result of uncovering the *righteous remnant self-identity* of the Pharisees. The instructor should raise the following questions for discussion based on the points from Goal 1. The questions are:

1. *Did the Pharisees view Jews that did not belong to their sect positively, negatively, or neutrally?*

Answer: Negatively. The Pharisees viewed other Jews who did not conform to Moses oral and written law nor kept appropriate barriers with Gentiles as at best, part of the problem, and at worse, utter apostates. (*To reinforce this point, the Pharisees treatment of Jesus and his disciples can be cited.*)

If this question fails to prompt discussion, the instructor may need to back up and ask the following questions;

- i. How did the Pharisees view Jesus and his Jewish disciples?
- ii. Why did they view Jesus and his disciples so negatively?

Two answers should emerge:

- a. In the Pharisee’s opinion, they broke the oral law of Moses. (Mat. 15:1-3, 10-12; Luke 6:1-4; John 5:8-11)
- b. Jesus crossed barriers in his dealings with Gentiles. (Mat. 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32; 15:1-2)

2. *In the opinion of the Pharisees, what would have happened to Judaism without them?*

Answer: The Pharisees believed that Judaism could not have survived their absence. They believed they were keeping Judaism “on the straight and narrow.”

3. *What role did the Pharisees assign themselves in their interactions with other Jews as well as Gentiles?*

While there may be many answers given to this question that will be valid, there is one specific answer that will need to be uncovered by the leader if the participants fail to do so. When this answer is uncovered, the leader needs to reinforce and draw attention to it.

The answer is: As the righteous remnant who preserves and guards the scriptures for Judaism, and thus preserves and guards the Jewish people themselves.

Possible quotes for power point:

“The Pharisees considered themselves ‘holy ones’ and claimed to be the ‘remnant.’ They attempted to realize the OT promise of the ‘holy remnant’ (Isa. 6:13; 4:2) by faithful adherence to the *tora* (cf. Tg. Isa. 4:3; 10:22) and by meticulous separation from the unclean ‘people of the land’ (*‘am-ha’ares*).” (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 4:Q-Z, 134.)

“Zeal for YHWH, the chief characteristic of the hard-line Shammaite Pharisees who formed the strongest Jewish pressure-group prior to AD 70, meant zeal for the Torah. One has only to read the books of the Maccabees to see what that meant. The heaven-sent law must be obeyed; there must be no compromise with the idolatrous ways of the nations. This law, moreover, must be defended; force must be used, where necessary, to protect the law and thus guard the life of the true Israel.” (N. T Wright, *The Victory of God*, 384.)

GOAL 3: Participants will be able to trace pharisaic behaviors to the *remnant self-identity*.

*Activity-* The leader will lead the participants in a discussion based on the Appendix 1. In an open discussion, the leader will take each branch and ask for volunteers to trace the pharisaic behavior to the pharisaic root. Below are possible answers that should emerge during discussion.

1. Exceeding biblical authority by making binding rules. (verses 1-4)

Answer: The Pharisees pursuit of moral perfection often leads them to build *pharisaic fences*, which turns convictions into commandments. As William Coleman writes: “If we dance, who knows where that might lead? Back up two steps and build a fence. Some movies could corrupt—two more steps back and build another fence. Who knows where wine at mealtime might lead? More fence. Eventually we are no longer wrestling with the core problem of drunkenness and adultery. Rather we are fighting mock battles at the new fences we have erected. Now the new laws become the really important battlefields. Soon we test a person’s orthodoxy by his respect for the fences.”<sup>1</sup>

2. Glorifying in personal piety. (verses 5-12)

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<sup>1</sup>William L. Coleman, *The Pharisees Guide to Total Holiness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1977), 9.



Answer: If one believes they are part of a remnant that are the faithful followers of God, this is bound to lead to self-righteousness and looking down on others not of the remnant. Tim Keller rightly points out that “Pharisaic people assume they are right with God because of their moral behavior and right doctrine. This leads naturally to feelings of superiority toward those who do not share their religiosity, and from there to various forms of abuse, exclusion, and oppression.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Obstructing the way to God by clouding salvation by grace through faith. (verse 13)

Answer: The Pharisee believes so deeply in the need for personal righteousness to stem the tide of evil in the world that they often fail to emphasize salvation by grace through faith.

4. Using their reputations for gain. (verse 14)

Answer: It is possible that leaders that are motivated out of their desire to promote the specific message of their “remnant” group will become zealous for the cause to the point of dishonesty. When you believe that you are saving the church or world, sometimes the end can seem to justify the means.

5. Evangelizing converts to their own sect. (verse 15)

Answer: If a pharisaical person believes that other churches have largely abandoned a wholehearted commitment to living all of God’s law, it makes little sense to aid them in winning converts for their apostasy. The Pharisee considers their church the only or at least, best expression of biblical Christianity. This means that to win converts is primarily about converting them to their particular understanding of Christianity.

6. Trivializing important aspects of God’s law. (verses 16-22)

Answer: Ultimately if membership is defined by adherence to righteous behavior, it must be measurable righteous behavior. As Carl F. H. Henry remarks, “smoking can be a subject of legislation; pride cannot.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore public righteousness becomes more important than inner holiness because it is measurable.

7. Emphasizing less important aspects of God’s law. (verses 23-24)

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<sup>2</sup>Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 58.

<sup>3</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 421.

Answer: See number 6.

8. Valuing outward signs of holiness over inner purity. (verses 25- 28)

Answer: See number 6

9. Persecuting those sent by God. (verses 29-36)

Answer: See number 4. The obvious example is the Pharisees plots to murder Jesus, who they felt was destructive to their righteous cause.

### ***Session 3-- How Jesus Spoke to Pharisees***

#### **Seminar Outcome**

Participants will be able to recognize pharisaic behaviors, understand the pharisaic self-identity that informs pharisaic behaviors, and learn to speak directly to the pharisaic self-identity.

#### **Session Objective**

Participants will learn how to speak directly to the pharisaic self-identity.

#### **Session Goals**

1. Participants will be able to explain how Jesus' addressed the "righteousness" of the *righteous remnant self-identity*.
2. Participants will be able to explain how Jesus' addressed the "remnant mentality" of the *righteous remnant self-identity*.

#### **Instructor Preparation**

The leader should be familiar with the section entitled *Jesus' Duel Message to the Pharisees* in chapter 2. The leader should also review Matthew 12-13 and be particularly familiar with the seven Kingdom parables in Matthew 13. The leader should strongly consider reading, as supplemental material for this class N. T Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 1996) pages 264-278.

### **Session 3-- Expanded Teaching Outline**

#### **Session Introduction**

The leader will review the previous session using the diagram entitled "Diagram of Pharisaic Progression" found at the end of this chapter. This review may be as simple as displaying the diagram and asking the class if they understand its implications. The leader will then ask the class, in reference to the diagram, "*If pharisaism can be likened to a tree, what would be the best way to destroy it?*"

Answer: For the leader, the point to emphasize is that the focus of a communicator's effort should be at the root of the tree, rather than spending the bulk of their time on the branches, that seem to quickly grow back.

Transition to the lesson: The leader, after establishing consensus with the class that the focus in addressing pharisaism should be directed at the root- *the righteous remnant self-identity*- the leader will propose that this implies a two-pronged attack. First, the preacher/teacher must address the *righteousness* of the Pharisee. Secondly, the preacher/teacher must also address the *remnant mindset* of the Pharisee.

### Lesson

GOAL 1: Participants will be able to explain how Jesus addressed the "righteousness" of the *righteous remnant self-identity*.

*Activity:* The leader will divide the participants into three groups and assign the following conversations that Jesus had with Pharisees. (If there is a group of 12 or more participants, 6 groups/pairs can be formed with the texts doubly assigned.)

- a. John 3:1-21
- b. John 8:1-11
- c. Luke 18:18-26

Each group will be given the following question- "*How did Jesus address the righteousness of the Pharisee(s) in each of these situations?*" The leader will give the pairs/groups 8-10 minutes for to read and discuss among themselves.

The point that the leader needs to reinforce is this: that in each conversation, Jesus tells "morally good" people that their righteousness is not good enough. Nicodemus "must be born again." The angry mob in John 8 is not without sin. The rich young ruler must do more if he wants to be judged righteous by the law. In each case, Jesus surprises his hearers with his grading of their righteousness. The point is that Jesus does not speak of the "glories of grace" or of "grace, positively stated." Rather, he speaks of the great need of grace, or of "grace, negatively stated." His words are gritty rather than lofty, condemning rather than affirming. Regardless of the Pharisee's moral accomplishments, they won't make the grade or earn them eternal life.

GOAL 2: Participants will be able to explain how Jesus addressed the "*remnant mentality*" of the *righteous remnant self-identity*.

*Activity-* The leader will make the following assertion: "*The message of the kingdom was a primary theme in Jesus' preaching. Thus, because much of Jesus' teaching was directed to the Pharisees, it was thus also a*

*primary theme in their confrontations as well. It was the preaching/teaching about the kingdom of God that was Jesus' tool for addressing the remnant mentality of the Pharisees.*" The leader will then assign the following "kingdom" parable to individuals, doubling up if necessary.

- a. Matthew 13:1-9 - Parable of the soils
- b. Matthew 13:24-30 – Parable of the tares
- c. Matthew 13:31-33 – Parable of the mustard seed/ yeast
- d. Matthew 13:44-46 – Parable of the hidden treasure/ pearl merchant
- e. Matthew 13:47-50 – Parable of the fishing net

After giving the class 3-5 minutes to read and briefly reflect upon the texts, the leader will ask to answer the following question during discussion: *According to this parable, what is the nature of the kingdom of God/Heaven?*

Suggested responses:

- a. Parable of the soils-God's Kingdom is for those who have open and receptive hearts for the gospel of Jesus, not necessarily those who achieve high standards of moral behavior as defined by any sect.
- b. Parable of the tares/ Parable of the fishing net- God's Kingdom consists of both good and bad coexisting together rather than separately until God's judgment.
- c. Parable of the mustard seed/ Parable of yeast- God's Kingdom has small beginnings but grows to permeate the world rather than existing apart from the world.
- d. Parable of the hidden treasure/ pearl merchant- God's Kingdom must be sought with great sacrifice. Membership in the Kingdom is achieved through seeking God rather than achieving righteousness.

To summarize GOAL 2, the leader might use the following power points:

"The objection (of the Pharisees) did not arise because Jesus was teaching or propagating a different religious system; nor because he was letting wicked people carry on with their sin and pretending all was well; nor because Jesus, as a private individual, was associating with people who were 'beyond the pale'. There is no reason to suppose that Pharisees, or anyone else, spied out ordinary people who were 'associating' with 'sinners' and angrily objected to them doing so. Accusations were leveled, rather, because this welcome to sinners was being offered *precisely by someone announcing the kingdom of god* (sic), and, moreover, offering this welcome as itself a vital part of that kingdom. The question was not about the sinners, or the moral or theological niceties of whether they had repented, and, if so, in what sense. It was about the scandalous implied redefinition of the kingdom itself. Jesus was replacing adherence or allegiance to the Temple and Torah with allegiance to himself. Restoration

and purity were to be had, not through the usual channels, but through Jesus.” (N. T Wright, *The Victory of God*, 273-274.)

“Rather than targeting a righteous remnant for inclusion in the kingdom, (Jesus) welcomed sinners freely. An unprecedented time of salvation had dawned in which God was restoring Israel not by purging the wicked but by offering forgiveness to any and all, a sort of general amnesty, so to speak. Occasionally, Jesus is reported to have said directly ‘Your sins are forgiven’ (Mark 2:5; Luke 7:48), meaning ‘God has forgiven them.’ More frequently, forgiveness is portrayed in word pictures: rejoicing over finding something that was lost (Luke 15:5-6, 9, 23-24); large and small debts being freely canceled (Matthew 18:27; Luke 7:42); the sinful tax collector being justified rather than the pious Pharisee (Luke 18:14). Jesus told the chief priests and elders, ‘the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you’ (Matthew 21:31). He told the Pharisees, ‘I have come to call not the righteous but sinners (Mark 2:17). . . . Nobody enters the kingdom by qualifying through righteous deeds; entrance is only by accepting God’s forgiveness.” (Harold W. Ballard, Jr., *A Journey of Faith: An Introduction to Christianity*, 84-85.)

#### ***Session 4-- Opportunities and Pitfalls when Speaking to Pharisees***

##### **Seminar Outcome**

Participants will be able to recognize pharisaic behaviors, understand the pharisaic self-identity that informs pharisaic behaviors, and learn to speak directly to the pharisaic self-identity.

##### **Session Objective**

Participants will learn how to speak directly to the pharisaic faithful remnant self-identity.

##### **Session Goal**

1. Participants will be able to identify Jesus’ approach to speaking to Pharisees in contemporary sermons.

#### **Session 4--Expanded Teaching Outline**

##### **Session Introduction**

The leader will review sessions 1-3, allowing the participants to raise questions. This review/discussion is expected to take 15-20 minutes.

##### **Lesson**

GOAL 1: Participants will be able to identify Jesus’ approach to speaking to Pharisees in contemporary sermons.

*Activity-* This activity will be achieved in the following way:

- a. The leader will divide the participants into three groups, with each group given a sermon excerpt from William Willimon, Haddon Robinson, or Timothy Keller. Each group will then be given 8-10 minutes to discuss the excerpt. The leader will ask each group to discuss whether their passage *does* or *does not* effectively speak to the pharisaic self-identity.
- b. After group discussion, the leader will place the first excerpt on power point and read it for the class. The leader will then ask the assigned group to explain to the class why their passage *does* or *does not* effectively speak to the pharisaic self-identity.
- c. The leader will allow for broader discussion by the class at large.
- d. The leader will repeat steps (b.) and (c.) for passages two and three.

**Except from a sermon entitled *Some Way to Run a Farm* by William Willimon, based on the Parable of the Wheat and Tares in Matthew 13:**

Perhaps what the farmer does is right. Yet everything dear to agriculture suggests that he is taking a big risk, that he is headed for a tough harvest. He is putting a lot of wheat at risk.

“Do you want us to gather up the weeds?” asked the servants. And we suspect that makes the most sense. No, wait, says the farmer. I’ll risk it.

Isn’t that wasteful? Odd? Especially for conscientious, ethically sensitive, religious people (like us), isn’t that odd? What kind of way is that to run a farm?

“Well,” says this farmer, “one time I had this one sheep that was lost. So I left the ninety-nine in the wilderness and searched until I found it. Then last year I gave this dinner party. I invited everybody I could lay my hands on. It was rough on the furniture, but, boy did we have a party! Then, when we had those grapes to harvest, at the end of the day I said, ‘What the heck? I’ll pay everybody the same wage, no matter when they started work.’ Besides, this is my farm and I’ll run my farm the way I run my farm. OK?”<sup>4</sup>

**WHY THIS SERMON WORKS:**

Willimon, in witty fashion, is redefining perceptions of the Kingdom of God and casting doubt in the minds of his listeners whether complete obedience to God equals divine blessing and protection. For Willimon, the church which is probably synonymous with the Kingdom of God is:

- a. Poorly ran from a human perception.

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<sup>4</sup> William Willimon, *The Collected Sermons of William Willimon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 112.

b. Messy, consisting of wheat and tares.

In other words, the Kingdom is not run particularly rationally from a human viewpoint with clear distinctions between those who are in and those who are out. Further, if God blesses his people, it will be in spite of the tares rather than because the tares have been removed and the church purified. Thus, separation from the tares (Gentiles or any other unclean group) is not specifically God's desire for his people.

These points can create resistance in a pharisaical mind. Yet, Willimon makes these points, which is likely to make the listener reconsider the teachings of Jesus.

**Excerpt from a sermon entitled *Good Guys, Bad Guys, and Us Guys* by Haddon Robinson, based on the parable of the Pharisee and Publican in Luke 18.**

Luke tells us that Jesus told this parable to those who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else. One of the symptoms of self-righteousness is a critical spirit, because one of the ways we feed our self-righteousness is by comparing ourselves to others. We usually look at their vices and think of our virtues, and that, we assume, gives us special standing with God. We have a way of cutting other people off at the knees and putting ourselves up on stilts. In comparison, we seem to stand tall.

Whenever you hear somebody always criticizing other people, see it as a manifestation of a self-righteous spirit. It's a kind of insanity that says, "If I pull your house down, my house stands taller." That is self-righteousness and the way proud people feel their pride.

Pope Gregory the Great said of this Pharisee that he was like the man who killed an elephant, but who was killed by the elephant's fall. The stench, the smell that comes out of this passage-- this horrible aroma that has about it the brimstone of hell-- is the smell of grace gone sour.

Here was a man with benefits: he had a knowledge of the Scriptures; he had been brought up in a good environment; his religious life had contributed positively to his character. But he took those things for granted; he thought that the good things given to him made him a creature of special merit and put him in special standing before God. Even though he thanks God, he is really practicing self-congratulation. He is saying, "Lord, you have made good soup. But you couldn't have done it without good material like me to work with." That's the smell of grace gone putrid. . . .

This Pharisee was in the presence of God, and in the presence of God he thought that the distinctions that mattered among men mattered with the Almighty. In the presence of God, he had a good eye on himself, a bad eye on his neighbor, and no eye on God.<sup>5</sup>

#### WHY THIS SERMON WORKS:

With strong imagery, Robinson advocates for grace by revealing the need for grace in our lives. He speaks of “this horrible aroma” of “grace gone sour” and “grace gone putrid,” phrases that evoke our senses. He then dissects the Pharisee’s heart when he speaks of the tendencies towards self-congratulation. Then Robinson drives home his point by turning a memorable phrase: “he (the Pharisee) thought that the distinctions that mattered among men mattered to the Almighty.” The effect of the sermon is to leave the hearer without any sense of being righteous before God and ashamed that he ever thought he could stand before God on his own merits. Instead of talking about the glory of grace, Robinson focuses on our great need for grace. If the hearers believe Robinson, then it is going to be difficult for them to leave believing that they are the righteous-remnant of God.

#### **Excerpt from a sermon entitled *The Prodigal Sons* by Timothy Keller, based on the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15.**

What we have in front of us here are the two basic ways that human beings try to make the world right, to put themselves right, and to connect with God-- moral conformity and self-discovery. Moral conformity and self-discovery. Moral conformity, people say “I’m not going to do what I want to do, I’m going to comply, I’m going to submit, I’m going to be good, I’m going to work hard.” Self-discovery says “I’m going to discover what is right for me, I’m going to decide what is right or wrong for me, I’m going to do what I want to do, I’m going to live as I want to live, I’m going to find my true self.”

Each side says “This is how the world will be better.” Each side says, “This is the way that you’ll be happy.” And Jesus says, “You are both wrong. Both wrong. You’re both lost. You’re both making the world a terrible place in different ways.”

See, the elder brothers of the world divide the world into two. They say, “The good people are in and the bad people, you, are out.” And the younger brothers do as well. The self-discovery people also divide the world in two. They say, “The open-minded, progressive-minded people are in and the bigoted and judgmental people are out.”

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<sup>5</sup>Haddon Robinson, “Good Guys, Bad Guys, and Us Guys,” (sermon, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, August, 1992).



And Jesus says, “Neither.” He says, ‘It’s the humble are in and the proud are out.’<sup>6</sup>

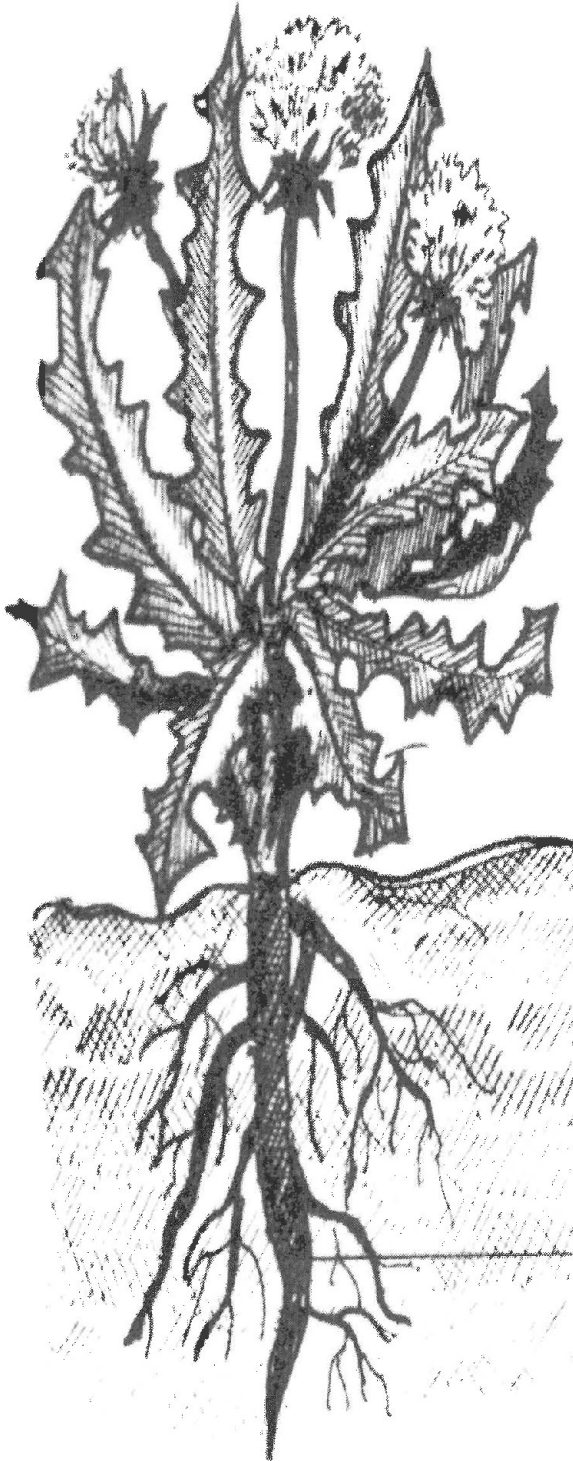
#### WHY THIS SERMON WORKS:

Keller uses a familiar passage to address the remnant self-identity. He talks about how most every group has a “we’re right and they’re wrong” mentality. Keller points out that the parable is actually agreeing with that premise, but disagreeing with the designation of who is “in” with God. Those who are “in” are the humble while those who are “proud” are out. This sermon works because it initially agrees with the pharisaical position, breaking down initial resistance that might exist. First, Keller agrees with the Pharisee in stating that those who seek “self-discovery” (in other words, those without pharisaical tendencies) are wrong. Secondly, he also goes so far as to state that Jesus may have a righteous remnant. However, Keller then closes the door by essentially saying, “there is a remnant, but it is the remnant of the humble not those who take pride in their righteousness.” In other words, Keller says “there is a remnant of God but it isn’t you.” With brilliance, Keller uses the righteous-remnant doctrine against those with pharisaical tendencies. This is reminiscence of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount where, after telling his audience that their righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), he then proceeds to redefine righteousness.

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Keller, “The Prodigal Sons” (sermon, New York City, NY, September 11, 2005).

## Diagram of Pharisaic Progression



### Weeds of pharisaism:

Pharisaic behaviors:

- a. Exceeding biblical authority by making binding rules.
- b. Glorifying in personal piety.
- c. Obstructing the way to God by clouding salvation by grace through faith.
- d. Using their reputations for gain.
- e. Evangelizing converts to their own sect.
- f. Trivializing important biblical commands.
- g. Emphasizing less important biblical commands.
- h. Valuing outward signs of holiness over inner purity.
- i. Persecuting those who are sent from God.

### Root of pharisaism:

The righteous remnant self-identity:  
The belief that they and their sect are the "holy ones" among the "apostates." They are the true followers of God, whose task is to convert non-converts and false converts to the true faith "once delivered to the saints."

### Soil in which pharisaism grows:

Deep concern for the welfare of the people of God.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES

The initial workshop was taught to nine members of Rock Chapel in Granite Falls, North Carolina who are involved in the teaching ministry of the congregation. One hour sessions were scheduled for three consecutive Wednesday nights from January 18 through February 1, 2012.

#### *A Seminar Overview*

Rock Chapel is a congregation that has a history of pharisaical behaviors. From the period of 1950-1990, the congregation forcefully taught a strict set of rules designed to keep the congregation separated from the world and other churches (dress codes, no TVs, no Christmas trees, refraining from worldly amusements, etc.). During this period, Rock Chapel taught that it was the only “true” church in their town. With the exception of two, the participants involved in the seminar, grew up in this atmosphere. Therefore, as the Pharisees were discussed, there were significant background experiences to draw upon by the participants.

The participants varied among those who teach periodically, are part of teaching rotations, or will be teaching in the future. The facilitator followed the Expanded Teaching Outline found in Chapter 4 with only very minor variations.

#### *Strengths and Weaknesses of the Seminar*

##### **Strengths**

- Participants overwhelmingly said the best part of the seminar was the information that was provided. As one participant reported, the seminar gave a “good understanding of why the Pharisees behave as they do.” Other positive

descriptions include: “very clear,” “understandable,” “knowledgeable,” and “insightful.”

- In the survey conducted three weeks after the seminar concluded, there seemed to be good retention of the characteristics of pharisaism as well as an understanding of why Pharisees behave as they do.
- Appendix 1: Diagram of Pharisaic Progression, was an important summarizing tool. Therefore the participants were asked to comment specifically on this illustration, rating its clarity on a scale of 1 to 5. It received five ratings of “5” and four ratings of “4.” Verbal comments included: “wonderful illustration”; “good, [demonstrates that] you need to go to the source of the problems”; “It makes clear that pharisaism starts in a good place . . . but shows how this turns into a legalistic point of view.”; “You should always be aware of the root causes of pharisaic progression to see that it does not creep up in your own life.”
- In response to the question, “Were there too many/ too few/ or about enough overheads?” eight participants responded “enough” or ‘about enough” while one participant responded that there were “too many.”
- From the point of view of the leader, the introduction questions that began each session seemed to effectively engage the participants and introduce the subject material. They also provided an opportunity for the seminar leader to gage the attitudes and thinking of the participants.

For an example, Session 1 essentially began when the leader posed the question-- “*What is the first word or phrase that you think of when you hear the term Pharisee?*” During this seminar, this question elicited a negative barrage that

included (self-righteous, narrow-minded, proud, boastful, contempt for others, exclusive/separatist, judgmental, rebellious, rigid/legalistic, snobbish, authoritarians). It was only with prompting that a positive remark was offered (know the law).

It was important to keep these negative words and phrases in a public place (white board, chalk board, etc.) to begin Session 2. This allowed the leader to use the established negative perception to begin Session 2 by asking- "*Given the unattractive nature of pharisaism, what would prompt any person to want to become a Pharisee?*" This led naturally to the conclusion that there must have been good, positive reasons for a person to become a Pharisee. In other words, in the beginning, pharisaism must have been attractive at some level. This set the stage to talk about pharisaic progression. The third session began with a discussion about Appendix 1, which focuses the attention of the participants upon the "root" of pharisaism. Again, this discussion was able to adequately introduce the need to focus on the causal reason for pharisaism rather than visible pharisaic behaviors.

### **Weaknesses**

- The weakest part of the seminar was the time constraints. One participant said that the time constraints did not allow an adequate amount of time for discussion. Another participant suggested that they "would have liked to have had . . . additional lessons" and that it seemed the leader "felt rushed to get everything presented in the allotted time." A third participant said that they would not have done anything differently, "other than allowed more time for each lesson."

- From the leader's perspective, a second significant weakness was the lack of saturation that was needed to discuss the pharisaic progression from the pharisaic identity to pharisaic behaviors. While there was lively discussion in other areas, the participants seemed ill-prepared during Session 2 to reflect on Goal 3 (Participants will be able to trace pharisaic behaviors to the *remnant self-identity*.).

### ***Recommended Modifications***

The seminar was originally taught on three one-hour sessions. After receiving feedback, session four was added to address the time constraint concerns. The original Session 3 was divided into two sessions, which also allows for additional time to review. It may be necessary to plan on 75 minute sessions as opposed to one-hour sessions. This will be dependent on the amount of discussion the leader discerns that the participants desire.

After reflection, it seems that sessions given weekly is a slightly better format than teaching the sessions consecutively on a single day. The reason is largely one of saturation. When this seminar is taught again, reading assignments will be given after session one that will allow the participants to reflect on the pharisaic progression. This was a clear weakness of the seminar. To aid in discussion it is recommended that two reading assignments be offered:

William Coleman, *The Pharisees' Guide to Total Holiness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1977), 6-16.

Tom Hovestol, *Extreme Righteousness* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 23-34

These passages will provide the participants with needed saturation to discuss the pharisaic progression.

On a final note, the leader should be aware that, while he/she is speaking *about* (emphasis added) Pharisees, they may also be speaking *to* (emphasis added) Pharisees. Therefore, some of the most valuable work to be done in this seminar is to help preachers and teachers with pharisaic tendencies to understand themselves.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **PRESENTATION FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE**

Sessions:

2. Defining Pharisaic Behavior in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
3. How Pharisaic Behaviors Result from the Pharisaic Self-Identity
4. Opportunities and Pitfalls when Speaking to Pharisees

Feedback Questions:

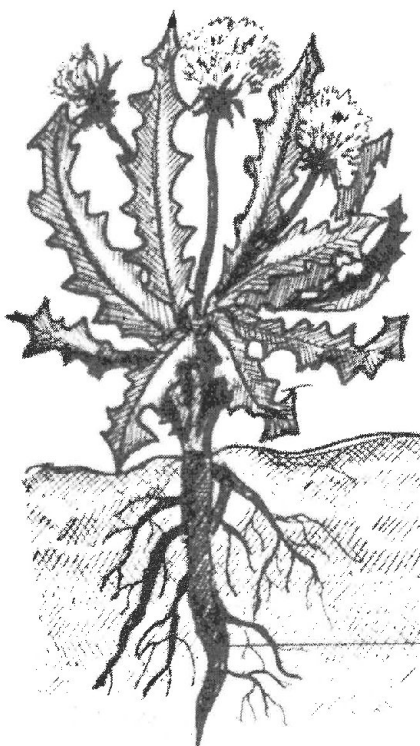
1. What were the major strengths?
2. What were the major weaknesses?
3. What would you have done differently?
4. Can you list 5-6 characteristics of Pharisees?
5. In a sentence or two, why do Pharisees act as they do?
6. What do Pharisees need to be told about themselves and about God's kingdom?
7. Were there too many/ too few/ or about enough overheads?



8. Could you share any comments you have about this illustration.

9. On a scale of 1 to 5, is this illustration clear or unclear?

#### Appendix 1: Diagram of Pharisaic Progression



##### **Weeds of pharisaism:**

Pharisaic behaviors:

- a. Exceeding biblical authority by making binding rules.
- b. Glorifying in personal piety.
- c. Obstructing the way to God by clouding salvation by grace through faith.
- d. Using their reputations for gain.
- e. Evangelizing converts to their own sect.
- f. Trivializing important biblical commands.
- g. Emphasizing less important biblical commands.
- h. Valuing outward signs of holiness over inner purity.
- i. Persecuting those who are sent from God.

##### **Root of pharisaism:**

The righteous remnant self-identity: The belief that they and their sect are the "holy ones" among the "apostates." They are the true followers of God, whose task is to convert non-converts and false converts to the true faith "once delivered to the saints."

##### **Soil in which pharisaism grows:**

Deep concern for the welfare of the people of God.

10. Did the classes move too fast/ too slow/ or just about right?

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